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ISSUE 024 | NOVEMBER 2012

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METAL GEAR RISING: REVENG

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(DON'T SUGARCOAT IT, nOOb.)

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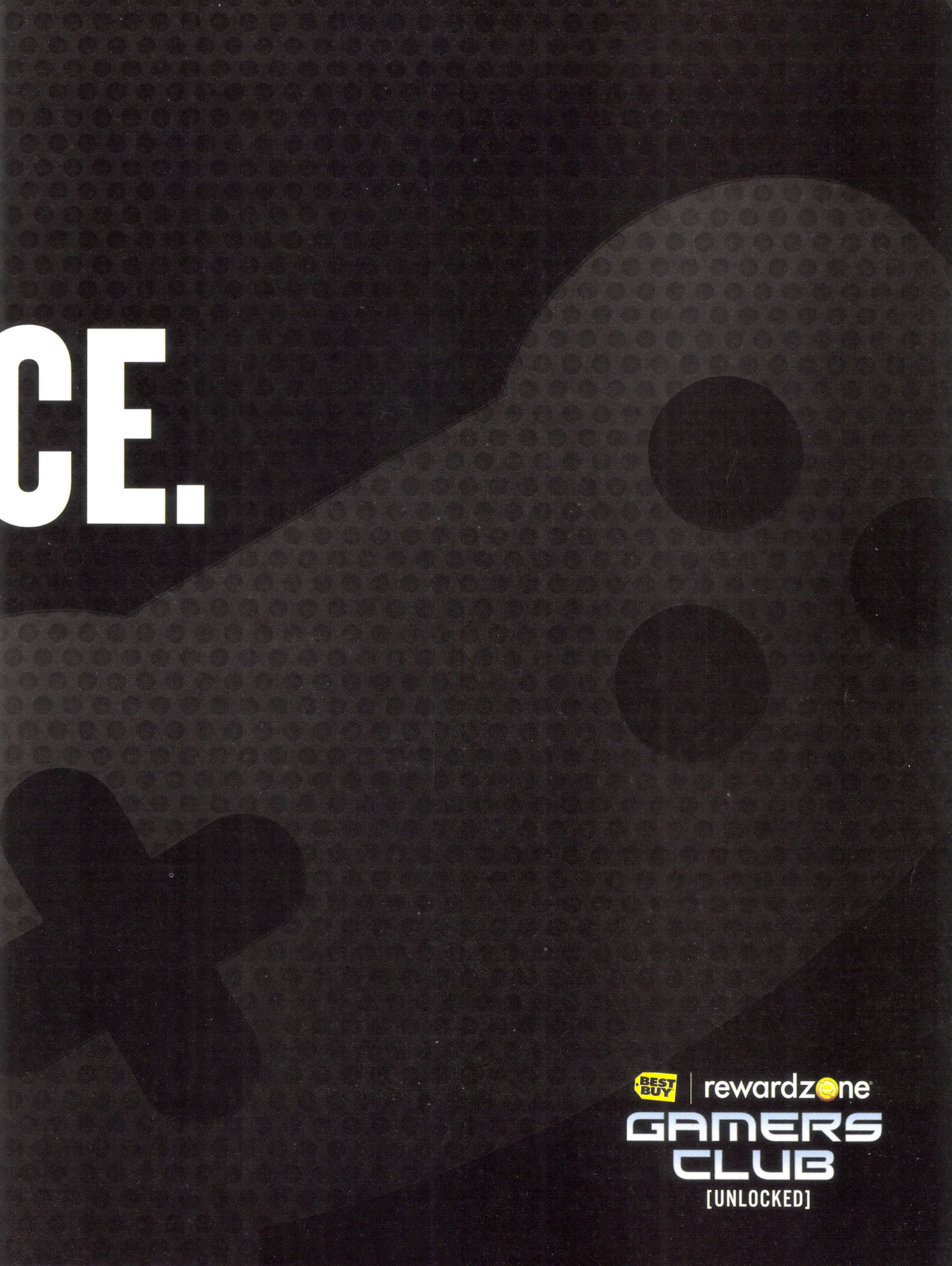
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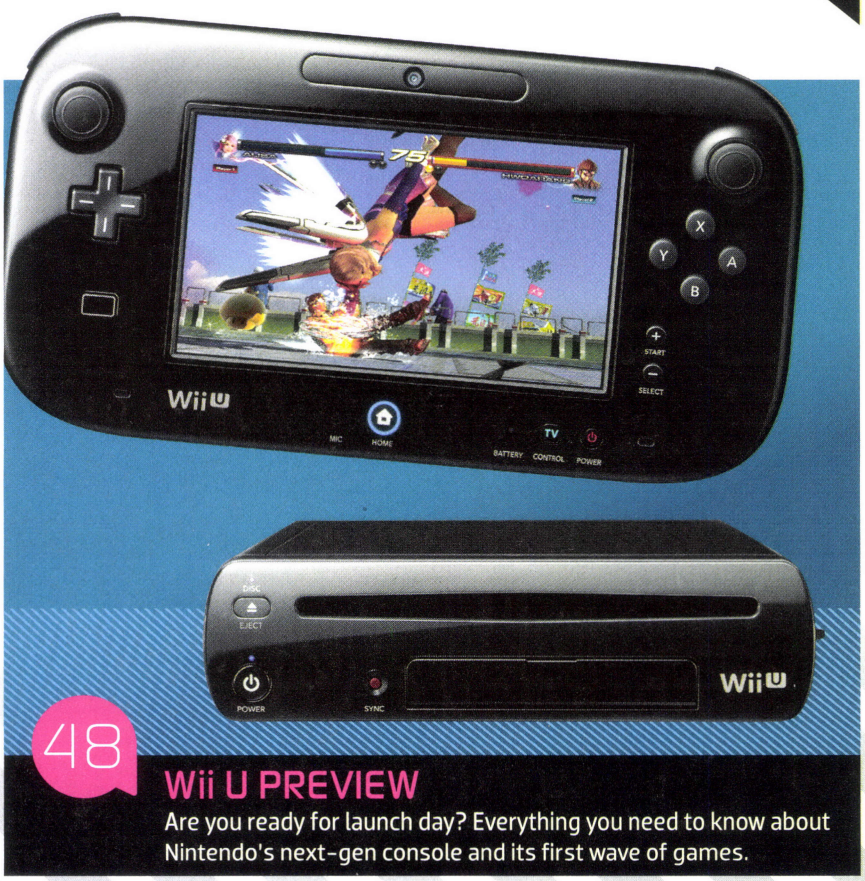

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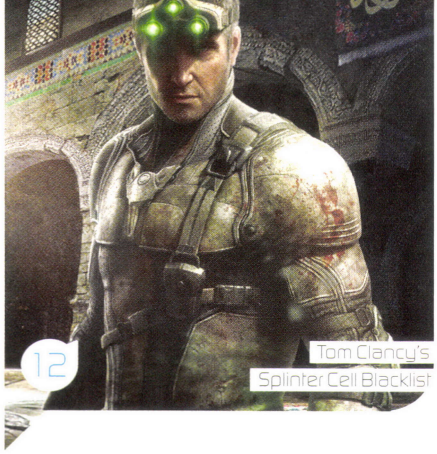

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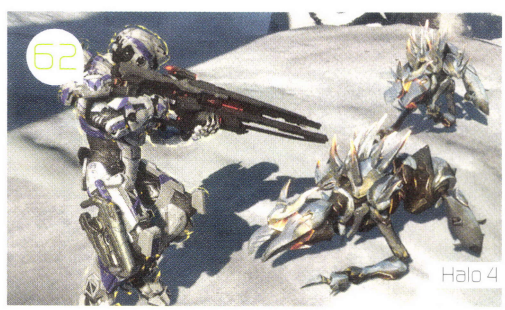

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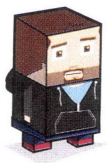
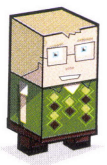


Charlie Barratt Executive Editor
Charlie couldn't share his "I'm thankful for" thoughts, because he's on leave having just welcomed a new addition to his family. Oh, yeah, probably that...



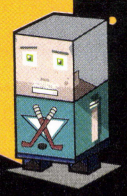
Ryan Taljonick Associate Editor
Ryan's thankful for airplanes and cars, because "without them I'd only be able to visit my family by cartwheeling across the continental United States." Truth!

Jenny Esdaile Art Director
In giving thanks, Jenny couldn't pick between her love of trashy shows on Bravo and getting free trips from being "a Virgin Airlines buddy." Why not both?

Jillian Lungaro Designer
Jillian is thankful that the weather is getting cooler. As long as there isn't a freak snow storm and we don't have to scrape windshields, we'll agree with her.

Letter from the EDITOR

WELCOME TO @GAMER



What am I thankful for? I've got a few. Of course I'm happy for my family's health, because they're the center of my world.

On a purely selfish level, I'm thankful that the year is getting closer to ending, because I'll be on a holiday break between Christmas and New Years, which will give me some free time to catch up on my annual pile of "games that I want to play for fun."

And I'd be foolish not to say that I'm thankful for the opportunity to write this letter...which means I still have this cool job working with an awesomely talented staff. There's so much more to it than "playing games for a living," which is what most people think, but it's still fun coming to the office to check out the newest games.

Speaking of "newest games," we're proud of our story on the upcoming Metal Gear game. We're testing a "dynamic cover," and we'd love your feedback. Scan it with the Future AR app and tell us what you think. Enjoy!

Andy Eddy
Editor-in-Chief

QR CODES AND HOW THEY WORK

Throughout the magazine you'll notice QR codes for some of the games. Simply install a QR reader for your smartphone (or install the Best Buy app for iPhone or Android), aim it at the QR code, and you'll be taken to a trailer for the game you just scanned.

Staff_

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If there's one thing Azeroth's been missing, it's dragon statues.

Quick question: I love the magazine and the coupons are decent, but...how come you never cover World of Warcraft? Mists of Pandaria was not listed in your Calendar page, never reviewed or previewed. But you did review Star Wars: The Old Republic and it made the front cover. WOW is in your Raptr Report every issue. So, what's the deal? Just curious, because you did cover Diablo III to some extent.

—Nick S. via Facebook

ED: Thanks for the note, Nick. Mists of Pandaria is an expansion, and we don't do a lot of coverage of expansions or put them on the Calendar. You'll find a review of Mists of Pandaria in this issue; unfortunately, we had to wait until the game's servers went live to review it, so that's why there's a delay from launch to the time you get to read the review in the magazine.

Thanks for the killer swag and great staff! You guys rock!

—David B. via Facebook

ED: You're very welcome, David! Thank you for noticing how much we rock, and since you read @GAMER, we're pretty sure you rock as well.

The deepest, most brutal game experience I've had all summer was playing the first episode of The Walking Dead adventures. It's so intense, it forces you to make really tough choices to survive. Can you please talk about this game more?

—Bill E. via email

ED: We'd love to, Bill! The game has been a favorite in our office due to its mature script, riveting character interaction, and, of course, zombies. In fact, if you haven't had a chance to play any of the episodes in Telltale Games' gore-filled adventure series (inspired by the graphic novel), you'll be happy to know a collected edition will be hitting store shelves on December 4th.

So many great games come out at the end of the year and then it seems like nothing comes out for months. Why can't companies space their games out?

—Rich G. via email

ED: It's just a fact of life that the holiday gift-giving season is the most profitable for game publishers, and many try to target this time of year for new releases. If it seems like there's ever a lull in new game releases, do what we do and rediscover a great game franchise you might have missed.

GAMING TRENDS, 140 CHARACTERS AT A TIME

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RYAN TALJONICK TWITTER: @RYANTALJONICK

Yesss, finally finished *The World Ends With You*! Now on to *Chrono Trigger DS*! Haven't played through that game since SNES. So. Excited.

ANDY EDDY TWITTER: @VIDGAMES

Flight attendant (looking at my *Space Invaders* t-shirt): "Ooh, *Pac-Man*!"

CHARLIE BARRATT TWITTER: @CHARLIEBARRATT

Achievement Unlocked: Tough day at work instantly improved when coworkers surprise me with baby gifts. 1000 points to the *@Gamer* team!

HILARY GOLDSTEIN TWITTER: @HILGOLDSTEIN

Seriously, Kinect should come with some kind of warning about having cats and dogs.

SPECIAL INTERACTIVE COVER

AR

Download the app!

To bring this month's cover to life, simply download *Future AR* from the iTunes or Google Play app stores. Then, point your smartphone or tablet at the cover to access hidden content.

BEST BUY CUSTOMER REVIEWS & RATINGS

WANT TO HAVE YOUR SAY?

What are you playing? Do you like it? Do you hate it? Let other @GAMER readers know what you think—send in a 50- to 100-word review to reviews@atgamermagazine.com, and we'll post 'em in each issue.

Submit your review to:
reviews@atgamermagazine.com

BORDERLANDS 2

Few sequels can surpass the original, but Borderlands 2 makes it look easy. The gameplay hasn't changed much, except weapon proficiency has been removed. The new ranking system is a nice perk for reaching milestones with characters. The story is more fleshed out than in the original and gives a reason to care for characters while being funnier than its predecessor (no easy feat). The enemy variety is deeper, too. Borderlands 2 truly is game of the year.

Score: 4.5/5 **—Eric Stevens.**

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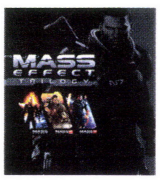
[Note: Letters may be edited for size and clarity.]

Blips...

News, rumors, and game culture deconstructed

NEWS BITES

MASS EFFECT TRILOGY is out November 6th for Xbox 360 and PC, collecting all three RPGs in one box. A PS3 edition (including the previously unreleased first game) will follow later.



NBA LIVE 13 has missed its shot at release. EA cancelled this year's installment of the basketball franchise due to recent builds being "less than acceptable."

EZIO TRILOGY follows Ezio's journey in an exclusive *Assassin's Creed* box set for PS3 that includes *AC2* and its DLC, *Brotherhood*, and *Revelations*. Thrill to more kills on November 13.

MORE MGS COMETH!

THE NEXT-GEN SNAKE

Following the announcement at the Metal Gear 25th Anniversary event in August that *Metal Gear Solid: Ground Zeroes* was in development at Kojima Productions, new details have slowly been trickling out.

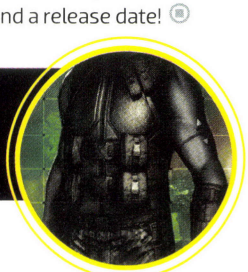
Here's what we know so far: The game will use the next-gen Fox Engine to depict a HUD-less open world that kicks off at a U.S. prison camp in Cuba. A sequel to *Peace Walker*, *Ground Zeroes* will feature Big Boss back in action as the eye-patch-wearing Naked Snake, who may get to hijack and drive one of the many vehicles—including helicopters—that he comes across.

Ground Zeroes will also build on the base construction of *Peace Walker*, possibly allowing you to maintain your bases from your cell phone. Competitive multiplayer is also a possibility, and will probably be developed in the U.S. Stay tuned for more details and a release date!

BEST BUY BONUS

SPLINTER CELL BLACKLIST

Pre-order for Xbox 360 or PS3 and get the Upper Echelon Pack, which includes the Echelon Suit, Gold Sonar Goggles, and bonus Aral Sea co-op mission.



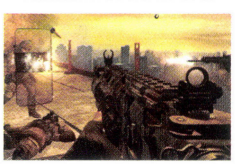
THE RAPTR REPORT

What are the hottest games being played by Xbox 360 and PC gamers? Raptr.com has the answer.

GUILD WARS 2

1	Borderlands 2
2	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3
3	League of Legends
4	Guild Wars 2
5	World of Warcraft
6	Minecraft
7	Battlefield 3
8	The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
9	Madden NFL 13
10	Team Fortress 2
11	DOTA 2
12	Call of Duty: Black Ops
13	Gears of War 3
14	Halo: Reach
15	Borderlands

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 3



GAME REWARDS
ACHIEVE TO WIN

Xbox Live has announced its MyAchievements program, which rewards Gold members for racking up achievements. Divided into three levels—Contender, Champion, and Legend—it unlocks rebates and gifts depending on your Gamerscore. The program is active now so start playing and get free stuff!

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

XSEED – TORRANCE, CA

Founded in 2004 by four former members of Square Enix USA, XSEED (*Way of the Samurai 4*) has focused on bringing Japanese games to the North American market. The publisher's latest release is October's *Ragnarok Odyssey* for the PS Vita.

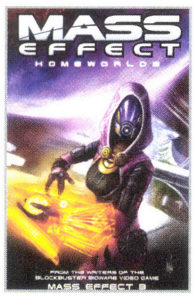
IN THE WORKS

Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen \\

Capcom announced *Dark Arisen*, the first expansion for *Dragon's Dogma*, at this year's Tokyo Game Show, promising that it will be "major." No details yet, but it will release sometime in 2013.

NERD WORDS...

Homewords?



Extend your *Mass Effect Trilogy* experience with the *Mass Effect Volume 4: Homeworlds* trade paperback from Dark Horse when it releases on November 21. Penned by the writers of *Mass Effect 3*, including lead writer Mac Walters, this collection stars characters central to the game such as James Vega, Tali, Garrus, and Liara, exploring the unique bonds they have to their home planets.

QUENCH THIRST, EARN EXTRA POINTS

Double XP in Halo 4

Mountain Dew has introduced a new promotion to help *Halo 4* players earn Double XP in multiplayer mode. Here's how to do (err...Dew?) it:

1. Register at DewXP.com.
2. Purchase specially marked 20 oz. bottles of Dew and/or bags of Doritos.
3. Enter the on-pack codes to your account at DewXP.com to load up on matches of Double XP.
4. Once *Halo 4* is released on November 6th, you can begin pushing Double XP matches to your Gamer Tag on Xbox Live via DewXP.com to accelerate the accumulation of special gear, weapons, and armor.

Five Questions with...

CLAIM TO FAME... Localizes Japanese games

JESSICA CHAVEZ

XSEED Localization Manager

1 What is your day-to-day job like? The day usually starts off with a quick scan of gaming news from around the world to see what's going on. Staying familiar with what's coming out, what's doing well, and what the fans want is important to putting out a good product or even just picking which games to bring over. Next I usually wade through my emails and try to sort out whatever catastrophic failure is happening during testing or submission. There's quite a variety to the work we do, but it all generally ends in bleeding eyes and sore butts from sitting 12 hours a day.

2 How did you get into localizing? I moved out to California to work at a comic book company, but six months later the whole thing folded. Destitute and living off canned tuna, I spent a couple of months working at a restaurant until a friend forwarded me a Craigslist ad. Turns out it was for XSEED and they were looking for someone with my exact skill set: editing, Japanese, and questionable sanity.

3 Is localization something you've always wanted to do? Gaming was something I just kind of stumbled into. Heck, I still marvel at the fact that I do this for a living. My dream of being in the UFC will never happen, but XSEED pays me to mold dialogue to my tyrannical whims, and what demented soul could fail to appreciate that?

4 What are some of your all-time favorite games? I'm all over the place when it comes to gaming. I like FPSs, RPGs, sims, puzzle games...*Suikoden II*, *Halo*, *Professor Layton*, *Fable II*, *Faxanadu*, *Demon's Souls*, *Myst*, etc.

5 What do you like to do in your free time? Free time? Should such a rare opportunity present itself, I try to fill it with hiking, reading, checking out the local craft beer scene, and, once in a blue moon, I go shooting. I also attempt to cook new and exciting things, but that's less a hobby and more an ongoing intestinal conflict.

Words: Andrew Hayward

Featured Game:

JUNGLE BOOGIE

Don't stop running in this terrific tablet spin-off.

Rayman Origins' *stunning look remains intact.*

RAYMAN JUNGLE RUN

Platforms:
$2.99, Ubisoft, ubisoft.com

Rather than try to shoehorn last year's excellent *Rayman Origins* onto touchscreen devices, Ubisoft took its standout feature—the stunning, hand-drawn visuals—and used it to create a bite-sized game that's perfect for tablets. *Rayman Jungle Run* looks just as slick as *Origins*, but rather than fiddling with virtual buttons, you'll tap once to send the titular hero running and then tap or hold again as needed to help him survive and interact with the stages. Getting to the goal in each brief mission requires jumping, gliding, running up walls, and even punching baddies. While simple in approach, the levels offer up a solid challenge. It's the Rayman you love in a tap-friendly package.

▼ You'll like him when he's angry.

AVENGERS INITIATIVE

Platforms:
$6.99, Marvel, marvel.com

Green with rage? Let off a little steam with *Avengers Initiative* as you assume the role of The Hulk and smash through scads of generic foes and iconic villains alike. As in *Infinity Blade*, you'll prevail in battle by swiping the screen to toss punches plus tap buttons to dodge or block attacks. *Avengers Initiative* packs in plenty of fan-service perks—such as classic costume pieces—to make it feel distinct.

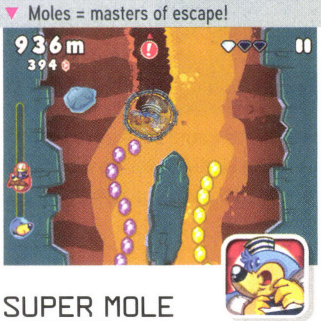
▼ Small flappers, big air.

TINY WINGS HD

Platforms:
$2.99, Andreas Illiger, andreasilliger.com

One of the absolute best iPhone games around is finally on iPad, with an expanded version that adds a new play mode. As in the original, the main goal in *Tiny Wings HD* is to build and maintain momentum as a flightless bird, sliding down the rolling hills to gain as much air as possible on the other side. Additionally, the game now includes a series of race missions that pits you against a few other fowl.

▼ Moles = masters of escape!

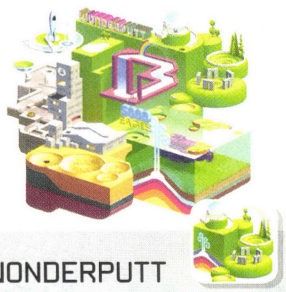


SUPER MOLE ESCAPE

Platforms:
$0.99, Adult Swim, adultswim.com

If you think a puny cell can hold an incarcerated mole, think again! In *Super Mole Escape*, you'll command one of the wily varmints, digging down through the earth to escape its captors. Simply tilting the iPad lets you dodge lava, ice, and giant rocks while collecting speed-boosting gems and helpful items. It's easy to dig into (pun intended), but difficult to master...plus the hand-drawn graphics impress.

▼ Putt's up?



WONDERPUTT

Platforms:
$0.99, Damp Gnat, dampgnat.com

Colorful courses are a mainstay of the mini-golf experience, but being able to see the whole course at once? That's the distinct hook of *Wonderputt*, a gorgeous iPad putt-putter that uses ever-changing terrain to generate 18 holes on a single screen. Seeing a field turn into a snowy downhill—and then a lily pad-covered pond—adds charm to the experience, and the pull-to-putt mechanic is well suited to tablets.

Safe travels, you maniacal porker.

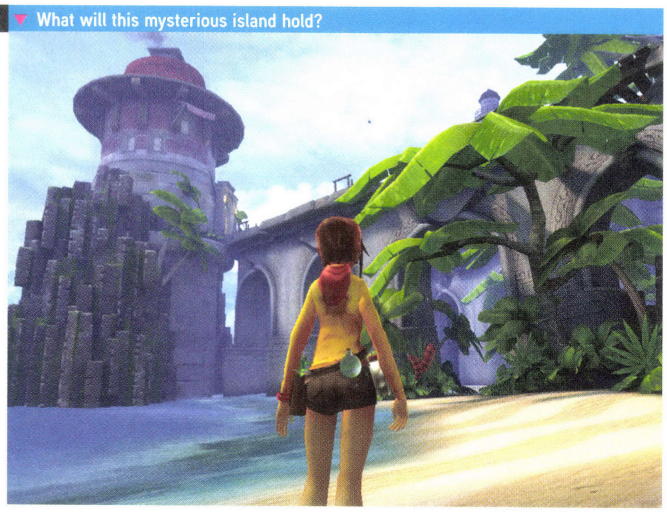
BAD PIGGIES

Platforms:

$2.99 (iPad), Free (Android), Rovio, rovio.com

Rovio's latest may star the cartoon pigs from *Angry Birds*, but this time they're the heroes—and you'll help lead them to their goal in each stage by building little rolling or flying contraptions. It's a lot slower paced than the slingshot-based games, but offers its own unique appeal, testing your ability to be economical or emphasize speed in alternating turns. Will the swine have the last laugh?

What will this mysterious island hold?



LILI

Platforms:

$4.99, BitMonster, bitmonstergames.com

Lili shows that slick tablet games don't have to feature intense violence or hulking male leads. Instead, this colorful, Pixar-esque affair follows a young girl exploring a mysterious island. To progress, she'll need to chase down odd creatures and pull the flowers from their backs in increasingly frantic sequences. It's a showcase title, no doubt, and the personality and unique premise really set it apart.

Ready to flex some strategic muscle?

THE BEST DEFENSE...

TOWER UP!

Much as the tower defense genre has spawned brilliant entries elsewhere, you'll find a steady stream of great entries on tablets these days. Here are our top picks:

01 KINGDOM RUSH HD ($2.99, armorgames.com)
Don't let its cartoonish look fool you: *Kingdom Rush* is seriously tough, but also hugely gratifying. Ample challenges and big boss battles help make this a winner.

02 PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES HD ($6.99, popcap.com)
When zombies try to take your lawn and roof, it's up to a hilarious array of colorful plants—such as pea-shooters and mines—to stop them (un)dead in their tracks.

03 FIELDRUNNERS 2 HD ($7.99, fieldrunners2.com)
This recent sequel takes the beloved original (also on Android) and amplifies the content, letting you construct even crazier mazes of turrets to slow down your foes.

04 ANOMALY: WARZONE EARTH HD
($3.99, chillingo.com)
Flipping the genre on its head, *Anomaly* actually lets you control armored vehicles as you drive through turret-packed paths. It's different, but no less challenging.

05 JELLY DEFENSE ($2.99, idreams.pl)
Not only does *Jelly Defense* impress with its brightly colored enemies on black-and-white backdrops, but the color-centric towers also add another layer of strategy.

06 IBOMBER DEFENSE PACIFIC ($2.99, chillingo.com)
With a more realistic military aesthetic, *iBomber Defense Pacific* carves out a place in the pack thanks to taxing missions, helpful upgrades, and bonus objectives.

07 SENTINEL 3: HOMEWORLD ($2.99, origin8.com)
The latest entry in this celebrated series serves up another round of science fiction-tinged action, with more than 20 weapons in the mix—such as orbital ship blasts.

08 DEAD STOP ($0.99, chillingo.com)
Here's another tower defense game starring the undead, but instead of plants, you'll use various oddball weapons—like a laser made from a discarded oven. Weird and cool!

09 RADIANT DEFENSE (free, hexage.net)
Living up to its billing, *Radiant Defense* serves up vibrant battles against a wide array of alien attackers with a dozen included missions—and no required purchase.

10 ARMY OF DARKNESS DEFENSE HD
(free, backflipstudios.com)
Inspired by Sam Raimi's cult favorite *Evil Dead* film sequel, *AoD Defense HD* serves up side-scrolling defense in which you'll summon allies to smash skeletal attackers.

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 2012

It's Peanut Butter Lovers Month!

■ Game Release Date ■ The @GAMER Podcast ↘ This day in videogame history...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
DECEMBER 2012 HIGHLIGHTS: **Far Cry 3: 12/4** **Rayman Legends: 12/4** **Family Party: 30 Great Games** **Obstacle Arcade: 12/4** **Hawken: 12/12**		If you want to keep tabs on all of the pre-order specials that Best Buy and game publishers have put together, just scan this QR code with your smartphone. One webpage will tell all!		01 SEE PAGE 62	02 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 50	03
04 @GAMER ISSUE 24 ON SALE	05 ↘ 2002 – *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance* was released as a revamped version of *MGS2: Sons of Liberty.*	06 ■ Halo 4 ■ Harvest Moon 3D: A New Beginning ■ NASCAR The Game: Inside Line ■ Winx Club: Magical Fairy Party ■ Dragon Ball Z: Budokai HD Collection	07 Halo 4	08	09	10
11 Nintendo Wii U	12 SEE PAGE 48	13 ■ Call of Duty: Black Ops II ■ Rift: Storm Legion ■ The Hip Hop Dance Experience ■ Ben 10: Omniverse	14 Call of Duty Black Ops II	15	16 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 51	17
18 ■ Nintendo Wii U ■ Epic Mickey 2 ■ Epic Mickey: Power of Illusion ■ New Super Mario Bros. U ■ Nintendo Land ■ Tekken Tag Tournament 2: Wii U Ed. ■ ZombiU	19 ↘ 2006 – The Nintendo Wii was launched in North America.	20 ■ Hitman: Absolution ■ PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale ■ Rise of the Guardians	21	22 THANKSGIVING	23 ↘ 2004 – World of Warcraft, the biggest MMO of all time, was launched. BLACK FRIDAY	24
25 New Super Mario Bros. U	26	27	28 Madden NFL 13 Wii U	29	30 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 52	

11/13 Continued ■ Rabbids Rumble ■ The Sims 3 Seasons ■ F1 Race Stars ■ Adventure Time: Hey Ice King! Why'd You Steal Our Garbage?! ■ Victorious: Taking the Lead

11/18 Continued ■ Scribblenauts Unlimited ■ Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge Wii U ■ Darksiders II Wii U ■ CoD: Black Ops II Wii U ■ NBA 2K13 Wii U ■ Madden NFL 13 Wii U

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TO SUBSCRIBE TO THE *@GAMER* PODCAST, GO TO ATGAMERPODCAST.COM

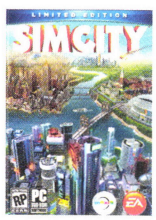
Pre-Order Exclusives

↘ Check out these special offers on upcoming games, available by pre-ordering now!

HALO 4

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: 343 Industries
Release Date: November 6, 2012

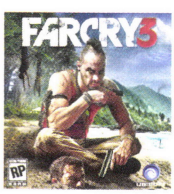
Fight like a boss in Halo Infinity Multiplayer! Pre-order *Halo 4* from Best Buy and receive an exclusive Venator Raptor multiplayer armor skin. The armor can be customized with your choice of colors.



SIMCITY: LIMITED EDITION

Publisher: EA
Developer: Maxis
Release Date: February 26, 2013

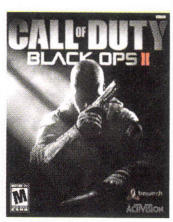
Add some superhero excitement to your virtual city! Pre-order *SimCity: Limited Edition* and get the SimCity Heroes & Villains bonus content featuring a battle between Maxis Man and his longtime nemesis Dr. Vu.



FAR CRY 3

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Release Date: December 4, 2012

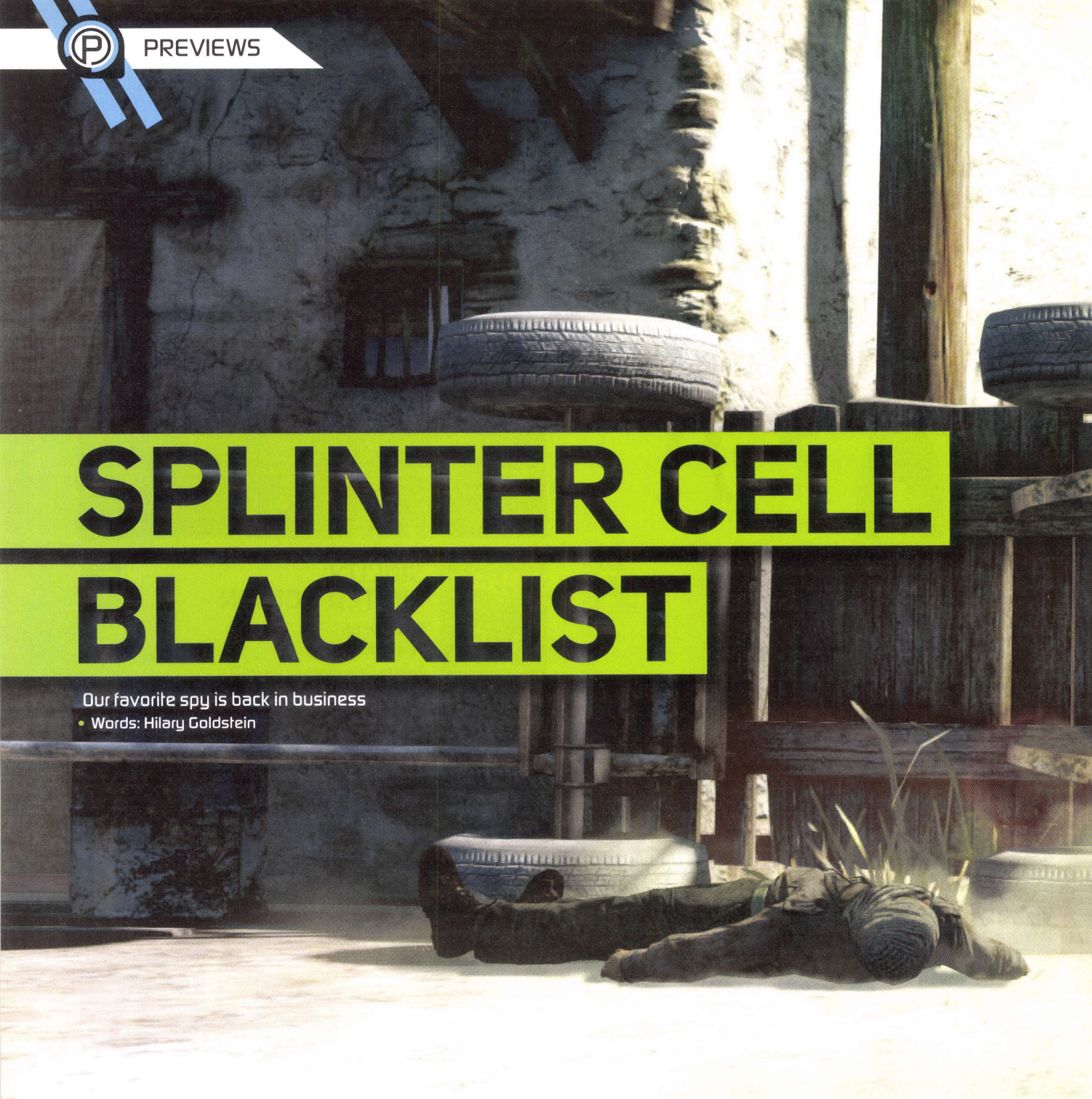
Pre-order *Far Cry 3* and get two exclusive single-player bonus missions—both "Forgotten Experiment" and "Ignition in the Deep"—plus unlock a Type 10 flare gun for multiplayer modes that's modified to shoot powerful 10-gauge shells.



CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS II

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Treyarch
Release Date: November 13, 2012

Explore an updated version of the fan-favorite Nuketown multiplayer map from *CoD: Black Ops* with Nuketown 2025 when you pre-order *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* for PS3, Xbox 360, or PC.



SPLINTER CELL BLACKLIST

Our favorite spy is back in business

• Words: Hilary Goldstein

Sam Fisher may be getting old, but he's certainly not getting any nicer. In *Splinter Cell Blacklist*, the gruff spy finds himself drawn out of retirement after some bad guys steal documents identifying all undercover agents operating in foreign countries. Now, Sam and crew must find and secure the blacklist before it's used to destroy America's international spy network.

What separates this from your typical *Splinter Cell* storyline is the introduction of moral choice. With no meter to measure your morality, these choices are merely determining how you want to play a spy. Let's say you have intelligence giving an 85% chance that your target is in a particular building. Do you order an air strike with a 15% chance you're targeting the wrong building? With American lives on the line, how certain must you be before ordering that strike? And let's say you only have about five seconds to decide. What then?

Your decision is likely going to be influenced by how you choose to prep for a mission. *Blacklist* allows you to customize every piece of Sam's suit and all his weapons to decide if you want to go in stealthily or with guns blazing. As long as you're skilled, you'll be rewarded—no matter if you go undetected or blow everything up.

It's hard not to want to go in guns blazing when Sam can call in support from his friends who can launch airstrikes on

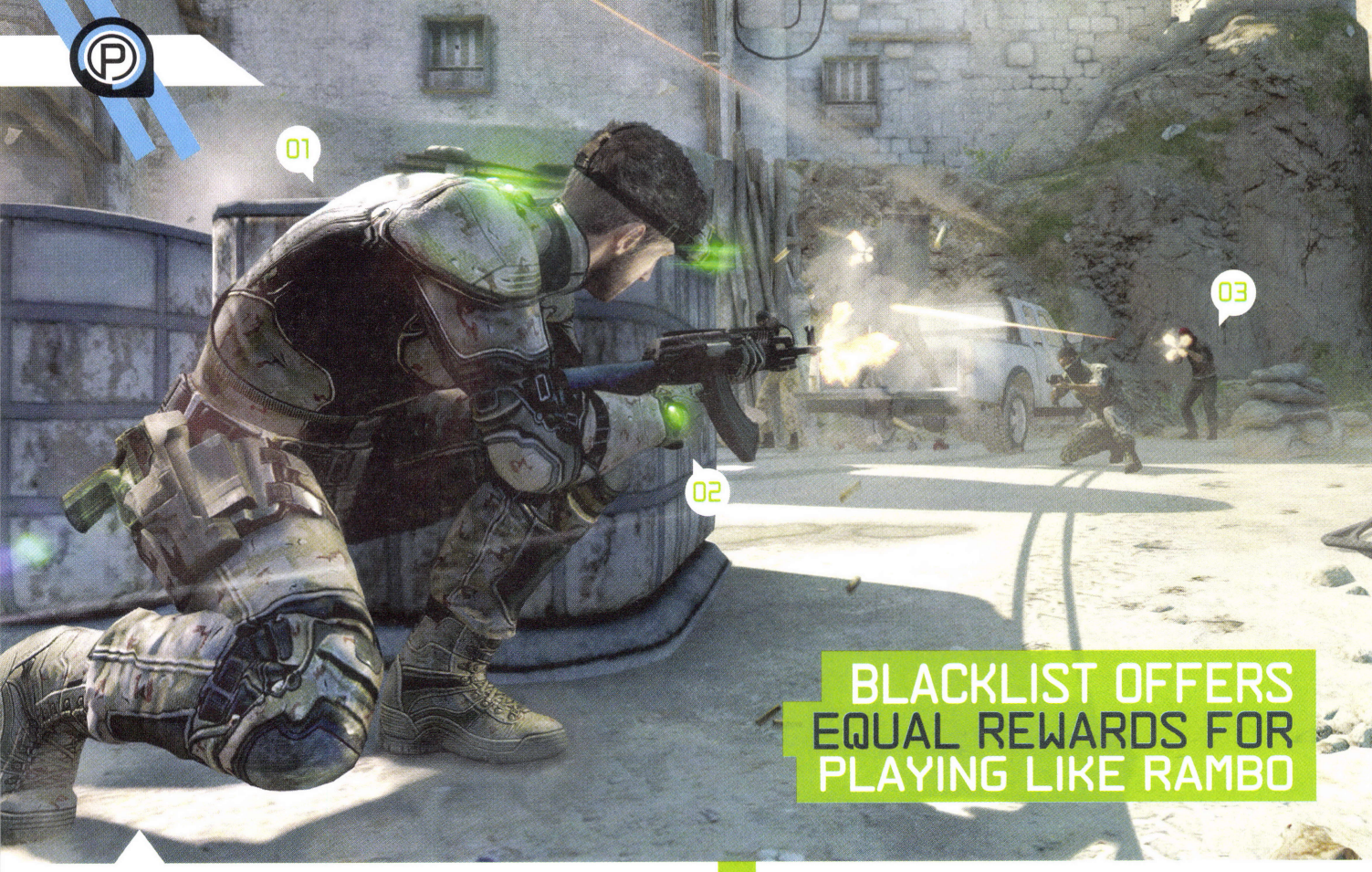
▼ Sam won't be sticking just to night scenes. He fights in daylight, in fog, and in severe weather conditions.

highlighted targets. As in *Conviction*, if you can score a stealth kill you can mark a set of nearby enemies and launch into a precision set of executions with the click of a button. If you're really talented you can Mark & Execute on the run, making for some stunningly cinematic firefights.

Expect things to be tougher this time around for Sam. Different enemy types have new defenses forcing you to alter your tactics as you progress through the campaign, so that no single approach will work from start to finish. Oh, and there are dogs. Unlike your average terrorist, dogs don't require line of sight to find Sam. They can smell a spy from a distance and will investigate with teeth bared.

Blacklist's single-player campaign sounds challenging and a step forward for the series. And with co-op and competitive multiplayer also in the mix, this could be the best *Splinter Cell* yet.

EXPECT THINGS TO BE TOUGHER THIS TIME AROUND FOR SAM



BLACKLIST OFFERS EQUAL REWARDS FOR PLAYING LIKE RAMBO

BUILD A BETTER SPY \\

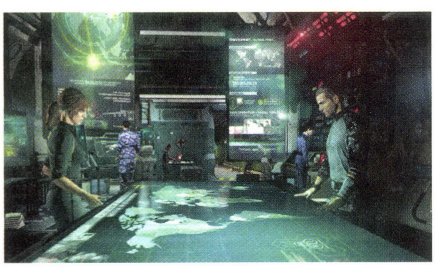
In the past, *Splinter Cell* forced you to be stealthy. That's not the case in *Blacklist*. The game offers equal rewards for playing like Rambo (with bonuses for things like not getting shot) or playing like a true spy and remaining unseen throughout a level.

NEW AND IMPROVED \\

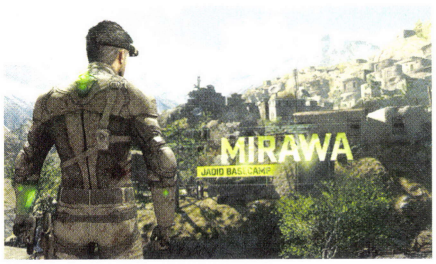
01
Every piece of Sam's suit is customizable. Armor up for action or dress for stealth. Play it your way.

02
Sam has lights all over his suit indicating when he's safely in shadow or when his cover's blown.

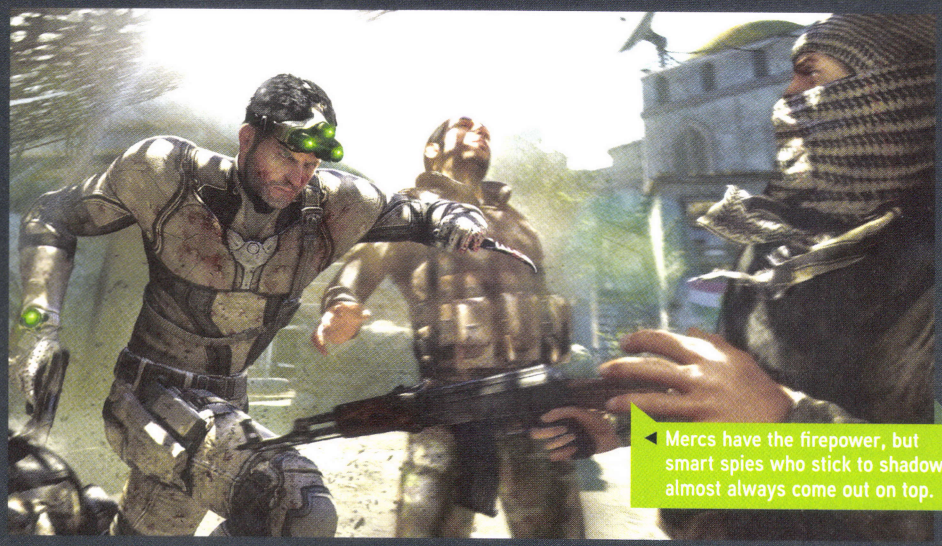
03
Killing enemies earns XP to spend on upgrades that are usable in single-player, co-op, and online multiplayer.



▲ *The Paladin* is the hub for all *Blacklist* activity. From here you can jump into any mode.



▲ Projected images highlight objectives, share important tips, and cast flashbacks on walls.



◀ Mercs have the firepower, but smart spies who stick to shadows almost always come out on top.

SPIES LIKE US \\

Absent from 2010's *Splinter Cell Conviction*, competitive multiplayer returns with Spies vs. Mercs. While Ubisoft is tightlipped on details of how the classic mode is changing, it will maintain its core principles. A small team of skilled Spies are hunted by a group of heavily armed Mercs. The Spies have limited firepower but are agile and sneaky, while the Mercs carry big guns and use a first-person perspective suitable for fans of *Call of Duty*. Or you can try the co-op campaign, where partners use unique team-based skills to complete a full story that's separate from Sam Fisher's exploits in the single-player campaign.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN SPYLAND \\

Sam's had a rough time the past few years. When told that his daughter was killed by a drunk driver, Sam did the only rational thing a father could do in *Double Agent*. Yes, he became a covert operative inside a terrorist organization. Sam was forced to kill his closest friend, Irving Lambert, to protect his own cover. Things didn't get any easier in *Conviction* as Grim, Sam's longtime ally, manipulated him with several lies in order to stop a presidential assassination. The good news? *Conviction* ended with Sam reunited with his not-actually-dead daughter, Sarah.

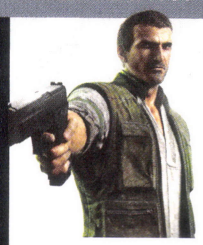
◀ GRIM PARTNER

Anna Grímsdóttir has served as a close, but not always trustworthy, ally of Sam's since the first *Splinter Cell*.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS

FIRST LOOK



RATING PENDING RP

SPLINTER CELL BLACKLIST

INFO
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Toronto
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
March 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 10-player online and 2-player offline

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Stealth killers and brutal interrogators

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
Check out *Splinter Cell Conviction*,

an underrated gem that adds speed and fast-paced action to a stealth game.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Splinter Cell Blacklist*.

WHAT'S GREAT:

- ❤ Customize your loadout to fit your play style
- ❤ Spies vs. Mercs multiplayer is back!

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- ✖ Use of UAV drone attacks is a lazy *Call of Duty* ripoff
- ✖ Michael Ironside is no longer the voice of Sam Fisher

GEARS OF WAR: JUDGMENT

The family that slays together, stays together • Words: Hilary Goldstein

Gears of War's cover-based multiplayer has always been a welcome alternative to the twitch-based shooting of *Call of Duty* and *Halo*. The focus on teamwork is heightened in *Gears of War: Judgment* with the new OverRun mode, which plays like a blending of Horde and Beast modes from past games. One side starts as the monstrous Locust, intent on destroying three separate objectives over the course of the match. The other side plays as COG soldiers, determined to defend sealed Emergence Holes and a generator. After each round, the teams switch roles, so each side gets a chance at attack and defense.

In other multiplayer *Gears* modes, you might pick Baird just because you like his chiseled chin. In OverRun, every character is tied to a class (Scout, Soldier, Medic, or Engineer), so be more cautious with your selection. Class-based combat, which locks you into specific weapons and abilities, is a first for the franchise and unique to OverRun. My favorite picks are the Medic, who tosses out stim grenades to revive fallen allies, and the Scout, who climbs to higher positions and uses Beacon grenades to tag incoming enemies for all COGs to see. A team with members that communicate and coordinate is almost unstoppable.

While the COGs have the edge in terms of firepower, the Locust are simply more fun to play. In every match, you're earning points spent to unlock better Locust forms including the nigh-unstoppable Mauler, who swings a flail and spins his spiked shield to shred any COG in his way. A Grenadier riding a ferocious Bloodmount can be quite a sight even if it looks comical at times. The most fearsome, though, is the Corpser. This spider-like beast can burrow under barriers and is tough to kill. Get it anywhere near an objective, and chances are it can win the day.

OverRun may be the best *Gears* mode yet, and it's just one mode added to the traditional mix of multiplayer offerings. It's sure to be the go-to mode for most gamers when *Judgment* is delivered next March.

DEFENDING YOUR TURF

Many *Gears* multiplayer modes give you only one life, forcing you to watch the rest of the round from the grave. OverRun offers unlimited respawns, but every second your COG is out of play is costly.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

Teamwork isn't just for COGs. Even the odd pairing of a Corpser and a Ticker can prove useful. They can quickly destroy fortifications, drawing opponents' attention while teammates flank from the other side.

MR. FIX-IT

The MVP of just about every match is a properly used Engineer. Armed with a Gnasher shotgun and a blowtorch, the Engineer has little in the way of firepower, but makes up for it in other ways. It's the only class that can repair barriers, and the Engineer can drop automated sentry guns that target nearby enemies. And yes, you get credit for the sentry gun's kills. Sure, Engineers don't wrack up as many direct kills, but they're essential to keeping the Locust hordes at bay.

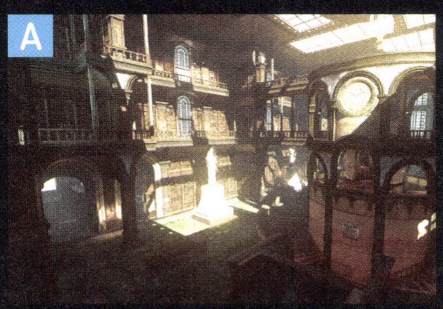
You won't live long in Free-for-All. Good thing there are infinite respawns to keep you in the fight.

FREE-FOR-ALL \\

It took four games, but *Gears of War* finally has a mode that makes it every COG for themselves. With maps specifically made for these 10-person fracases, Free-for-All is not a cheap addition. Fights are fast and chaotic, but a bit out of character for the series. Epic says *Judgment* is being made as a thank you to fans, and those fans have been begging for Free-for-All for years.

MAPS MATTER

Little has been shown of *Judgment*'s multiplayer to date, with only a few maps revealed. What we know is that some maps are exclusive to certain modes, meaning you can expect a more tailored experience. That should enhance online gameplay over past titles that forced most maps to work for multiple modes.



DEATH ARENAS

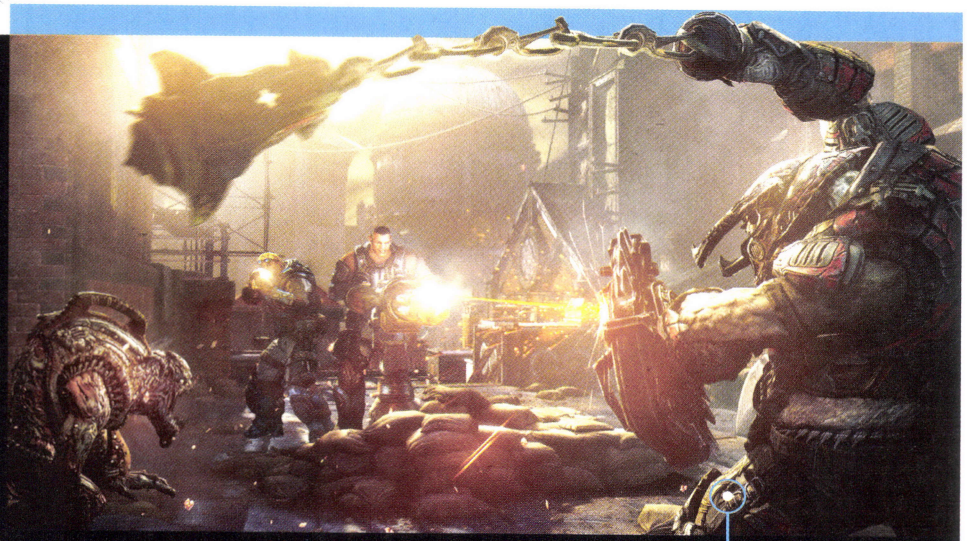
A peek at the areas you'll be fighting over

A Tight spaces and high walls make this a paradise for COGs with shotgun skills. Free-for-All's Library map does have one spot perfect for sniping.

B The Island map is an early favorite. There are plenty of good ambush spots allowing a smart crew to flank and strike the opponent when they're out in the open.

C Rooftops is a congested OverRun map that can be well fortified if COGs work together. The Scout is valuable from the perches.

D The Gondola Free-for-All map is just plain nuts. This sky-high setting has working gondolas that offer fast transport.



HORDE NO MORE?
No word yet on whether OverRun replaces Beast and Horde modes or if they'll be included.

GEARS OF WHOA
If you thought Gears 3 was pretty, just wait. What Epic's shown of Judgment easily surpasses it.

BLAST FROM THE PAST \\

***Judgment*'s campaign is a prequel, taking place in the early days of the Locust War. Kilo Squad—which consists of Damon Baird, Augustus Cole, and Garron Paduk—is on trial for treason after stealing experimental COG tech during the battle of Halvo Bay.**

The story is told as a recounting of the court transcripts. Some of that testimony is redacted, but by choosing different difficulty settings when you replay a mission, more of the transcript is revealed. This means new info, new elements to the mission, and tougher challenges.

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

GEARS OF WAR: JUDGMENT

INFO
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: People Can Fly/ Epic Games
Platforms: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
March 19, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 10-player online

GENRE
Third-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone wanting more of the Cole Train, and way less of Marcus Fenix

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Check out *Bulletstorm* to see the kind of bawdy humor People Can Fly brings to a sci-fi shooter.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Gears of War: Judgment.*

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ New OverRun mode mixes on-the-fly strategy with intense action
- ❤ Pre-match overview shows all weapon locations so even newbies stand a chance

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Free-for-All breaks some of the fundamentals of *Gears* multiplayer

The bigger they are, the more satisfying it is to pull out their huge elephant brains.

GOD OF WAR: ASCENSION

Going forward by going backwards • Words: Hilary Goldstein

Kratos, the perpetually grumpy protagonist in the *God of War* series, has sampled almost everything Greek mythology has to offer. He's visited Hades' darkest depths and scaled Olympus' tallest heights. He's opened Pandora's box, slain a pantheon's worth of gods, and sunk Atlantis. Where does a murderous albino rage machine go for his next adventure? Into the past, of course!

Longtime *God of War* fans might groan at the prospect of another prequel, but *Ascension* goes back further than any of the others, giving us a younger, slimmer, and (surprisingly) more humane Kratos than we've seen before. The story sees Kratos, fresh off the accidental murder of his own wife and child, trying to break his dark pact with incumbent war-god Ares—and being pursued by the enforcer-goddess Furies for doing so. (The only one revealed as of press time is Megaera, a warrior who scuttles around on four gigantic spider legs that sprout from her back, Dr. Octopus-style.)

While the story might be rooted in Kratos' past, *Ascension*'s gameplay feels like an advancement over *God of War III*. With much more PS3 experience under their belts, the GoW team has created something faster, prettier, and potentially much bigger than Kratos' previous outing. The combat is as satisfying as ever, as Kratos gracefully cuts through his foes with the chained Blades of Chaos. It feels quicker, too—more responsive and more brutal. Even the quick-time execution sequences have been retooled; some are traditional press-the-buttons-on-cue bits, but others are more interactive—as was the case when Kratos wrestled a lumbering Elephantaur to the ground and alternated between beating its face in and ducking its clumsy blows before opening its skull to reveal its throbbing brain. So, yes, even the gore has improved.

MORE THAN CHAINS \\

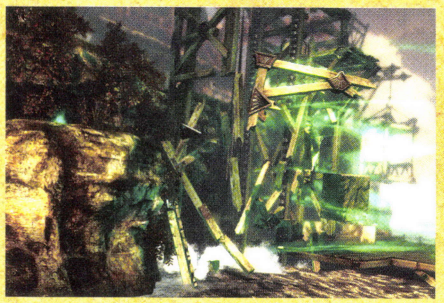
With *Ascension*, the developers seem to have finally given up on trying to create big secondary weapons that replace Kratos' iconic—and immensely fun—Blades of Chaos. Instead, he'll now be able to snag semi-disposable armaments that support the Blades in different ways. Using a sword, for example, lets him integrate its powerful short-range strikes seamlessly into chain-blade combos, while the infinitely throwable spear—though not so good in combos—offers a much longer range. Other weapons include a club, a shield, and a sling...which will no doubt be devastating.

YOUNG AND NOT-SO-IDEALISTIC \\

Kratos has clearly changed from his older, stockier, nastier *God of War III* incarnation, and the differences are more than skin-deep. This is Kratos before he replaced what little humanity he had left with a single-minded desire for revenge. And while he's still a vicious piece of work, his more mellow side shows through in little actions, like pushing a bystander out of the way of an incoming spear (instead of, say, pulling him into it).

IT'S GOOD TO BE KRATOS \\

▲ Living statues are a pretty good reason to bust out Kratos' rage powers. Rowr!



▲ A new puzzle ability, LifeCycle, lets Kratos reassemble ruined parts of the environment.

◀ This hulking goat-man might look big now, but only because he still has legs.

GAME DETAILS — FIRST LOOK

RATING PENDING RP

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GOD OF WAR: ASCENSION

INFO
Publisher: SCEA
Developer: SCE Santa Monica Studio
Platforms: PS3

RELEASE DATE
March 13, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
8-player online

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone who loves savagely slicing monsters to gory pieces

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Conveniently, all five *God of War* games have been collected into one $40 package called *God of War Saga*.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *God of War: Ascension*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Hack-n-slash action feels retooled, but still fantastic
- ❤ Prettier than even the stunning *God of War III*

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Quick-time events look impressive, feel passé
- ✖ No resolution to *God of War III*'s final stinger

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It's November and we're most thankful to save some of our hard-earned cash on new games. This month, we've carved $105 off the regular prices of a heaping pile of tasty games and dripping-hot gear.

For starters, get $15 off the fighting extravaganza *Dead or Alive 5*, chop 10 bucks off *Need for Speed The Run*, and grab an Astro headset for $20 less.

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Utilizing a unique triangle battle system, *Dead or Alive 5* cranks the franchise's exciting gameplay up a notch to keep you on your toes. Choose to battle from a roster of fighters that includes Ryu Hayabusa, Hayate, Ayane, Hitomi, and more, and unleash powerful combos, devastating Power Blows, and overwhelming counters to dominate your opponents.

02 NEED FOR SPEED THE RUN

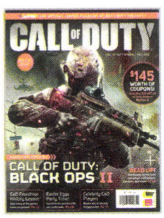
Prepare for the race of your life! This illegal, high-stakes race across the country requires slick driving skills and sheer determination to be first. There are no rules, no allies, and most importantly, no speed limits in this dangerous competition. Battle against hundreds of the world's most infamous on the country's most hazardous roads.

03 NARUTO SHIPPUDEN: ULTIMATE NINJA STORM GENERATIONS

Generations brings together a vast selection of more than 70 playable and 15 supporting characters from every generation of the Naruto saga, including Storm 1 and Storm 2. With a record number of characters, including Naruto and Sasuke, you'll be able to continue the skirmish well into the night.

04 NBA BALLER BEATS

NBA Baller Beats uses the beat of the music to inspire and condition your body to move with fierce control. Pick up the included, official NBA game ball replica from Spalding, and let the beat of one of the 30 licensed hip-hop, rock, and old-school tracks stimulate your muscles into picking up some major skills.



05 CABELA'S DANGEROUS HUNTS 2013 BUNDLE

Prepare for a wildly exciting and heart-stopping hunt that challenges you like never before! This adventure introduces the new Top Shot Fearmaster wireless controller, which uses a biometric heart rate monitor to integrate your actual heart rate into the game. Successfully control your heart rate to increase accuracy, deal more damage, and slow down time to line up the perfect shot.

06 ANY PRE-OWNED GAME $29.99 OR ABOVE

There are literally hundreds of pre-owned games to choose from and apply this $10 off coupon to. For example, usually priced at $44.99, play through *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* for only $34.99. Dive into the gritty world of *Max Payne 3* for the same bargain price. Or prepare for *Halo 4* by playing through the most recent *Halo* release, *Halo Reach*, for a discounted price of $19.99. It's a deal too good to refuse.

07 ASTRO GAMING A50 WIRELESS HEADSET

Immerse yourself in your favorite movies, hear every call on the field, and listen for each move your enemies make with this A50 Wireless Headset. Operating at a high frequency for optimal clarity and range, the headset features 5.8 GHz technology and Dolby 7.1 surround sound for exceptional sound quality. The headset is compatible with most platforms, including Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, PC, and mobile devices.

08 @GAMER CALL OF DUTY: SPECIAL EDITION MAGAZINE

Celebrate the entire *Call of Duty* franchise with this special issue from the makers of @Gamer. The issue features a massive cover story on *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*, a retrospective of the entire series, expert multiplayer tips, behind-the-scenes info on the making of the games, and much, much more. And, hey, it also comes with $145 worth of coupons for games and gear, so it more than pays for itself.

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DMC: DEVIL MAY CRY

The Son of Sparda returns • Words: Anne Lewis

I won't lie: When the Devil May Cry reboot was announced, I was nervous. This is a franchise I love, and at first glance DmC looked like a step in an all-new direction that I wasn't comfortable with. I mean, who is this guy pretending to be Dante with a bad smoking habit? However, the more I saw the more I came to realize that this isn't just a reboot. It's an evolution.

The two demos I played were perfect complements to one another; one offered a tutorial of sorts, and the other put all the things I learned to use. The first showed off the combat and gave me a good look at the streets of Limbo City, which is DmC's demon-ruled setting. Here, demons pull the strings from a parallel dimension known appropriately as Limbo. Dante often gets pulled into this dimension, being forced to fight his way through chunks of the city, cutting down hordes of demons in the process. Learning to use skills like Demon Pull and Angel Lift, which let Dante drag enemies closer as well as bridge long distances, was absolutely necessary for survival

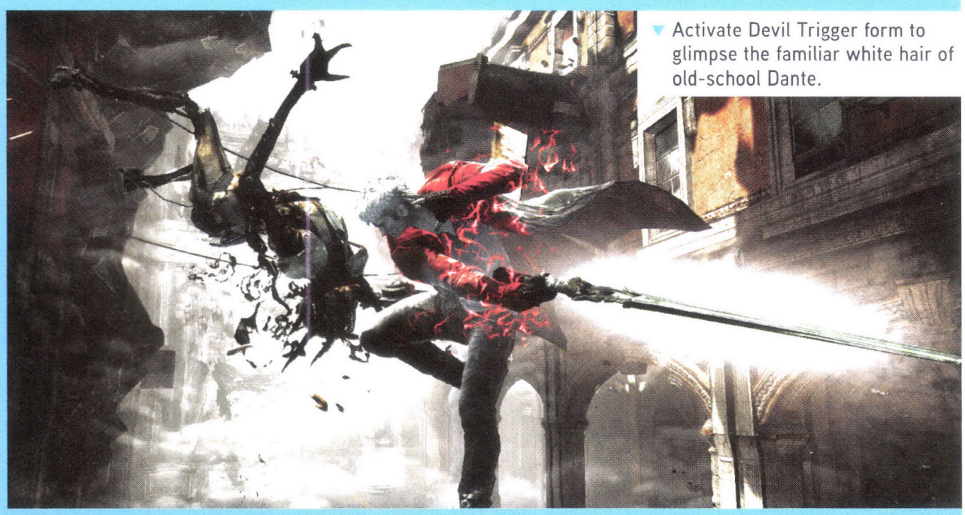
DANTE IS RASH, IMMATURE, AND HAS A FILTHY, FILTHY MOUTH

in my second demo, which introduced a boss fight.

The boss battle (against the world's ugliest succubus) forced me to abuse Dante's Angel Lift ability, as I had him leap from platform to platform to avoid the succubus' vomitus attacks. This was a long fight, and death seemed inevitable. Luckily the Gold Orb system is back and using one will revive Dante right where he died, letting him jump back into combat with full health restored. There's a good bit of personality in this demo as well; Dante is rash, immature, and has a filthy, filthy mouth.

DmC has a very distinctive and colorful aesthetic, but I was only truly sold on this new interpretation as a worthy successor to the original series when I had the controller in my hand and was able to put Dante through his paces. He may look a little different, but the combat is flashier and more stylized than ever. The familiar hack-n-slash of its predecessors has been vastly improved, and subtle touches keep DmC in line with the rest of the franchise.

Demonic Skills
Devil and Angel modes change the use of Dante's weapon.
Raze Me, Bro!
Some area-specific enemies will require special attacks to defeat.



▼ Activate Devil Trigger form to glimpse the familiar white hair of old-school Dante.

THE GREAT KAT \\

Kat joins the pantheon of female companions that Dante has in DmC. Little is known about this psychic voice of reason, but we do know that she was sent to help Dante under the orders of her boss—another familiar face, Vergil. Unlike in the original games, Vergil doesn't appear to be the bad guy here. But we could be wrong.

FAIR AND BALANCED? \\

A thinly veiled jab at Fox News, Raptor News Network is Limbo City's leading news source with a hate for Dante. This is not the only satire in the new DmC. Developers have said that reality TV, pop music, and other "societal ills"are also up for satirical skewering.

▲ THE PARTY STOPS WHEN YOU DO

"Virility" is DmC's Rockstar energy drink. It makes people smarter, stronger, and more physically attractive. Unfortunately, its secret ingredient is this, er...lovely lady's upchuck, and it's slowly poisoning its consumers.

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

DMC: DEVIL MAY CRY

INFO
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Ninja Theory
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
January 15, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Fans of flashy hack-n-slash

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Devil May Cry HD Collection is a great way to get familiar with the older games. Feel free to ignore *DMC2*.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *DmC: Devil May Cry*.

WHAT'S GREAT:

- ❤ The vibrant, eye-catching environments are highly memorable
- ❤ Familiar aspects keep *DmC* grounded in the mechanics that made the series great

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- ✖ A failed combo means a low rank, and a low rank means I feel bad about myself

FUSE

In Insomniac's new sci-fi shooter, "co-op" actually means "co-operation"

• Words: Paul Semel

In *Romeo & Juliet*, Shakespeare wrote, "That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Apparently Insomniac Games doesn't share the Bard's view—its previously announced shooter *Overstrike* has now been rechristened *Fuse*. But after playing the game at a recent event at Insomniac's offices, it's clear to me that the new moniker fits the game better, making it even sweeter.

In the game, "Fuse" is an alien compound that the U.S. government has weaponized. But when Raven, a terrorist paramilitary group, steals the source of Fuse, it's up to four elite soldiers to get it back.

A cover-friendly, third-person, four-player co-op, sci-fi shooter, *Fuse* has all the tenets you'd expect from such hyphenated descriptors. But unlike some co-op games, *Fuse* encourages cooperation. Each character has their own Fuse-based weapon (as well as the usual assortment of pistols, shotguns, and missile launchers). But while you earn experience, called Fuse Points, for every enemy killed and task completed, you'll earn more when working with allies.

For instance, Jacob's Arc Shot is a Fuse-powered crossbow. But if he takes out an enemy by shooting an explosive bolt through the shield generated by Dalton's Magshield, he'll get even more Fuse Points than if he'd just killed the guy on his own. And if that enemy was also covered in the explosive crystals formed by Izzy's Shatter Gun, then she, Jacob, and Dalton would all receive even more points.

The teammates further collaborate when, after using their Fuse-based weapons a lot, they can engage Fusion mode, giving all four characters a brief but significant boost. Naya's black hole-shooting Warp Rifle, for example, is normally prone to be crippled by overheating. But in Fusion mode, it has no such restriction.

Needless to say, it's understandable why Insomniac changed the name from the bland *Overstrike* to the far more apt *Fuse*. It even prompted the devs to jettison the game's original stylishly cartoonish look in favor of something more muscular. I just hope Shakespeare understands.

▲ Like all good modern warriors, the soldiers in *Fuse* understand the benefit of cover.

▲ Izzy's crystal-creating Shatter Gun is especially effective when used against Fuse-fueled mechs.

DANCING WITH MYSELF \\

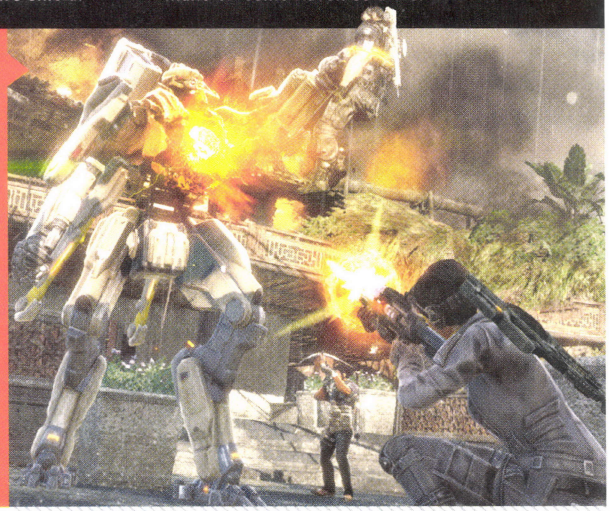
While *Fuse* is being built and billed as a four-player co-op shooter, it will also be friendly toward people who don't play well with others. Not only can you play the campaign solo, but if you play it that way, or with less than a full team of four, you'll be able to jump between the AI-controlled characters whenever you want.

▲ Using teamwork, Izzy, Jacob, and Naya shoot from behind the protection of Dalton's shield.

▲ Here we see Dalton and Jacob going mano a mano on some Raven soldiers.

GOOD TIMES WITH WEAPONS

Coming from the gadget hounds at Insomniac, the weapons in *Fuse* have creative secondary fire options. Naya's Warp Rifle shoots miniature black holes that can be linked and exploded simultaneously, while Izzy's crystal-shooting Shatter Gun also dispenses healing crystals. Dalton's Magshield gives him portable cover that he can plant for others to use, and Jacob's crossbow-like Arc Shot's bolts can be shot into the environment and exploded at just the right time.



GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

FUSE

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Insomniac Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
March 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
TBA

GENRE
Third-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Squaddies who value coordination and playing well together

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Gears of War 3 is still one of the best co-op shooters around

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Fuse*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Solid controls make it easy to use the creative weapons
- ❤ Encourages you to coordinate attacks with your teammates

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Each character only uses one Fuse-powered weapon
- ✖ Fuse-based weapons have somewhat limited ammo

COMPANY OF HEROES 2

The cold may be your greatest enemy • Words: Dennis Scimeca

▲ If this snow were heavy enough, it would actually provide your soldiers some cover.

Company of Heroes 2 moves the real-time strategy franchise from World War II's Western Front to the Eastern Front in the Soviet Union. The Eastern Front was the more brutal of the two, and that's reflected in the gameplay through the new ColdTech system, which simulates the severe winter conditions that turned the tide in the Soviets' favor.

The cold can literally kill your troops if they're not warm enough. You'll need to make sure engineers are building plenty of campfires along your troops' path so that they can warm themselves before the harsh conditions take their toll. Frozen rivers can crack under the force of explosions and send your tanks plummeting to the bottom. Huge drifts of snow can force tanks and other vehicles to take double the amount of time you would expect them to need in order to cover the same distance on open ground.

Not all of the levels have these sorts of blizzard-condition environmental hazards, though. Developer Relic wants to mix things up throughout the single-player campaign and offer blizzard maps as part of the variety of multiplayer. When you do have to deal with the cold, it's almost like playing an entirely different game from *Company of Heroes*.

The brutality of the Eastern front is also reflected in some of the new tactical possibilities being introduced with *Company of Heroes 2*. The new TrueSight system only makes enemy troops visible when they are in direct line of sight of your troops. That means you can be sneaky and launch ambushes, retreat more effectively by employing cover to block visibility, and use such ordnance as smoke bombardments to prepare for assaults and give the enemy much less time to respond to your attacks.

Resource management is also markedly different than in the original. Instead of having fixed points for obtaining fuel and ammunition, you can now seize strategic points and build up to three resource-generating structures of your choosing. This really changes the multiplayer dynamics because there will no longer be obvious choke points centered around resources, making it much more difficult to just starve the enemy of resources so you can eventually roll over them with ease.

Company of Heroes 2 may be more brutal, but it's also much more satisfying tactically. Small decisions have big consequences, so fight smart to win!

THE COLD CAN KILL YOUR TROOPS IF THEY'RE NOT WARM ENOUGH

NO RETREAT \\

Soviet soldiers were forbidden from retreating during the war, and you can see that ferocity embodied in *Company of Heroes 2*. Soldiers can now vault over cover and better use the environment as they close on the enemy. Flamethrowers can burn down almost anything on the field, and the map features many more destructible elements than in the first game. The new ways to use cover and avoid suppressing fire also promise plenty of close-quarters brutality.

SMASH IT ALL

Pretty much this entire village could be razed to the ground given enough time and artillery or tank rounds. Flamethrowers would help, too.

BEWARE OF ICE \\

▲ Ice won't spontaneously crack when your tanks roll over. Only explosions crack the ice.

GET ATTACHED TO YOUR MEN!

▲ Unlike in the real war, you can't throw conscripts at the enemy until they break.

▲ Wisely using small units—such as snipers—is important when snow slows reinforcements.

COMPANY OF HEROES 2

INFO
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Relic
Platforms: PC

RELEASE DATE
Early 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
TBA

GENRE
Real-time strategy

SUITABLE FOR
World War II history buffs, strategy aficionados

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

The basic tactics of *Company of Heroes: Gold* apply to this sequel. Consider it your boot camp.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Company of Heroes 2*.

WHAT'S GREAT:

- ❤ Battling the cold adds a new layer of challenge
- ❤ Expanded tactical options like real ambushes

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- ✖ Fighting in winter conditions slows the game down
- ✖ Forgetting to build fires and your troops freezing to death as a result

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

FIRST LOOK

RATING PENDING RP

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

DEAD ISLAND RIPTIDE

INFO
Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Techland
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to four-player online co-op

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Zombie killers out for a four-player group experience

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Dead Island wasn't perfect, but it's still a great start and preparation for *Riptide*.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

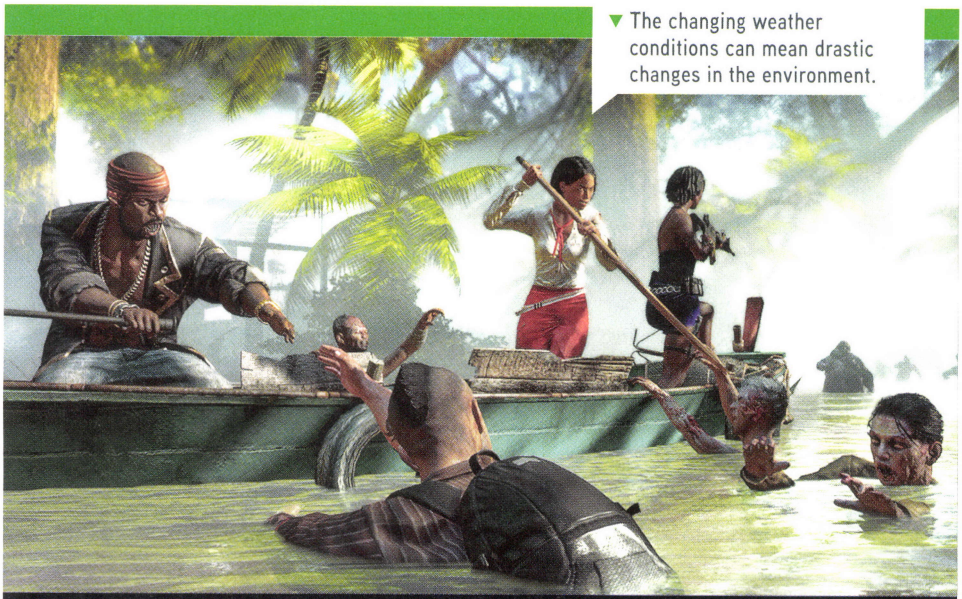
Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Dead Island Riptide*.

WHAT'S GREAT:

- ❤ Shooting mechanics have been strengthened
- ❤ The story is now an essential part of the gameplay

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- ✖ I expected more after two years of development time
- ✖ The premise is kind of hokey. How bad can those poor characters' luck be?!



▼ The changing weather conditions can mean drastic changes in the environment.

DEAD ISLAND RIPTIDE

Welcome to Palanai, get ready to kill some zombies! • Words: Alex Rubens

When *Dead Island* was released in 2010, it excelled in its cooperative and open-world zombie killing, but lacked the polish that most AAA titles require these days. Thankfully, Techland is back with *Dead Island Riptide*, and the developer has learned from the mistakes and criticisms of the first game. *Riptide* isn't a simple expansion—it's a completely new game that continues the story of the original, but set on another zombie-filled island.

Riptide takes a different direction than the original, as it is less about "run, run, run" and more about taking the time to fortify and defend an area from hordes of zombies. These hub defense missions require planning as you place mines, set fences, and mount guns to protect yourself. They aren't just throwaway missions, either, but will play a large role in the story.

The new island of Palanai was hit by a monsoon, so the weather system has been improved in *Dead Island Riptide* to allow tropical storms to sweep in and change the landscape, sometimes requiring you to use a boat where you once drove. It's wise to head for shelter during stormy weather, as this aggravates the zombies (featuring new mutations not seen in the original) and reduces visibility, making it quite easy for them to get the flesh-eating drop on you.

Riptide also features a revamped gunplay system that should deter you from using melee weapons exclusively (as many did in the original) by emphasizing ranged combat. Though it's looking good so far, it remains to be seen whether Techland can give *Riptide* that extra coat of polish that the first *Dead Island* lacked.

OUR RETURNING HEROES

Our triumphant heroes return in *Riptide* after escaping Banoi Island. It doesn't stay happy for long though, as Sam, Xian, Logan, and Purna crash land on Palanai during a tropical storm, where they will be joined by a fifth new character. In addition, the level cap has been raised for all characters and each has a revamped skill tree.

GUARDIANS OF MIDDLE-EARTH

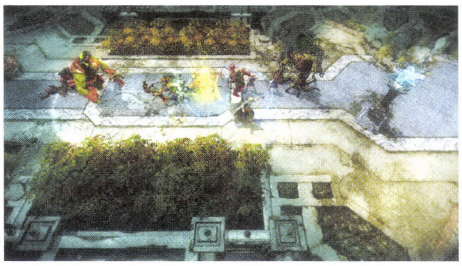
One MOBA to rule them all • Words: Hilary Goldstein

The Multiplayer Online Battle Arena genre—commonly called MOBA—which includes *League of Legends* and *Rise of Immortals*, is huge on PC but almost completely absent on consoles. MOBA games usually pit two teams against one another in a rush to destroy the opponent's base, with each player controlling a powerful guardian that can be powered up as the match goes on.

Tons of items are available to buy and customize your guardian, including potions, epic abilities (such as one that summons a Balrog to the battlefield), and hundreds of gems to boost stats and abilities. XP earned during battle upgrades you on the field, but also earns you coins to spend on items and new guardians once the fighting has stopped. The entire upgrade process has been streamlined for keyboard-less consoles.

At the start of every five-on-five match, you choose your guardian from a mix of well-known and obscure characters from *The Lord of the Rings*—Sauron, Galadriel, Legolas, and so on. That choice largely determines the role you'll take in combat. Gandalf is of the Enchanter class, with powers geared toward weakening enemies, while Gollum is a Striker, with low health but effective melee attacks.

Guardians might prove a bit intimidating to lifelong console gamers who've never heard of a MOBA, but don't worry. Monolith's got your back, offering player vs. AI bot battles to practice tactics, along with training and tutorial modes to get you on the path to arena domination.



▲ You start every match at level 1 and earn XP to upgrade your character's four unique abilities.

▲ Expect *Guardians* matches to last 15-20 minutes, much shorter than in a traditional PC MOBA.

MOBAS EXPLAINED \\

A MOBA is like a mix between a real-time strategy game and an action-RPG. AI-controlled soldiers march along three different paths on a symmetrical map and your job as a guardian is to protect and assist them using your unique powers. As you gain levels during a match, you'll upgrade your character's abilities to help counter your opponents' unique skills.

▲ *Guardians'* one-lane map forces all the action to one spot.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS — FIRST LOOK

GUARDIANS OF MIDDLE-EARTH

INFO
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
Developer: Monolith
Platforms: PSN, XBLA

RELEASE DATE
December 4, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
5-vs-5 online

GENRE
Multiplayer Online Battle Arena

SUITABLE FOR
Those sick of the same old thing on consoles

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

League of Legends is a free-to-play PC MOBA and will give a great sense of what the genre offers.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Guardians of Middle-Earth*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Simplifies MOBA controls without sacrificing strategic depth
- ❤ Something fresh and new for console gamers

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Frustrating experience if teammates don't work together

DEFIANCE

Sci-fi gameplay collides with Syfy television in this shooter-MMO • Words: Ryan Taljonick

Shooters have a history of struggling to gain a foothold in the MMO arena—surprising, considering a certain FPS franchise smashes software sales records year after year. But *Defiance*, a third-person shooter MMO, is taking a unique approach by merging gameplay with television; it will launch in conjunction with a TV series of the same name.

Defiance (the TV show) will air on the Syfy channel, featuring NPC characters from the game as they work together to survive the aftermath of an alien terraforming attack on Earth. The big draw here is that the show will incorporate in-game events in its overarching narrative, and, best of all, player-made clans and characters from the game will eventually become real organizations and characters on the show, creating one massive, interconnected experience—so long as your character isn't named something dumb, like, say, xXDarkNinja420Xx.

Of course, developer Trion Worlds (creators of the fantasy MMO *Rift*) knows a quality sci-fi TV show can't trump quality sci-fi gameplay. In practice, I found *Defiance* plays a lot like *Borderlands*. Everything from the sprawling, half-alien open world to a slew of wildly inventive firearms is present here, in addition to gameplay mechanics ripped straight from Trion's own *Rift*. Ark Falls—essentially Rifts—are dynamically generated alien assaults that culminate in a giant boss fight finale. Crushing these invasions yields tangible rewards in the form of fancy new guns, shield generators, weapon mods, and more.

Defiance's world is also full of other interesting things to do. You'll find plenty of *Saints Row*-inspired challenges (kill X enemies with a giant super cannon), MMO-like co-op dungeons, and player-versus-player battlegrounds called Conflict Zones. Everything in the game is built with teamplay in mind: challenges have leaderboards, Ark Falls encourage people to group up, and players of varying levels and skill can form a party to take on dungeons and quests, thanks to an equalizing system akin to *EverQuest II*'s mentoring mechanic. And, if filling aliens' faces full of futuristic lead isn't appealing enough, you could always try to get your brony-themed clan onto the TV show. My Little Pwnies for life!

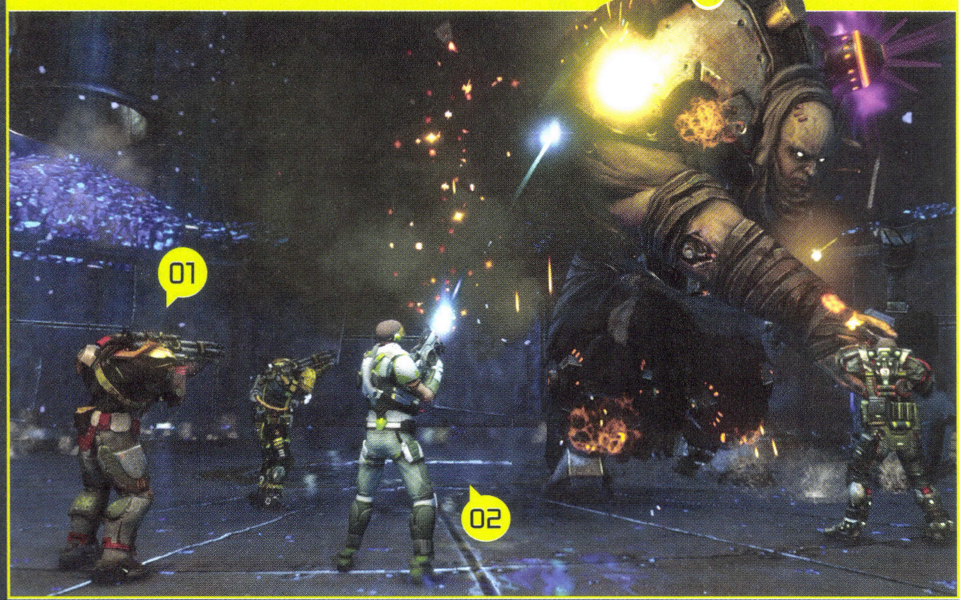
EVERYTHING IN THE GAME IS BUILT WITH TEAMPLAY IN MIND

WHAT A PARTY \\

A core component of any MMO is group-based dungeons, which *Defiance* has in ample supply. What makes these interesting, though, is that there are no character classes in the game. Instead, you must choose your loadouts wisely, as some weapons, such as the Bio-Magnetic Gun (BMG), can heal wounded friendlies, while other firearms are better suited as crowd-control tools. Either way, everyone is expected to shoot and take cover.

FREAK SHOW

Just because Defiance is a shooter doesn't mean it won't have elaborate MMO-inspired boss encounters. This monster means business.



01 POWER UP

Each character can equip one primary ability, such as a sprint speed increase or a cloaking skill. These are invaluable tools.

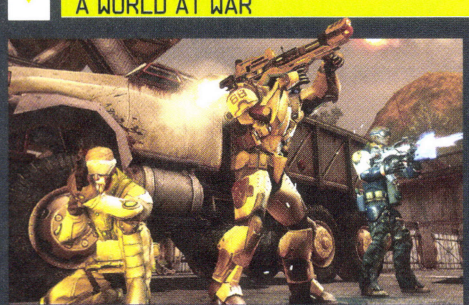
02 MOD TIME

Many guns come equipped with modification slots, which allow you to increase firing power, clip size, reload speed, and more.

FRIENDLY FIRE \\

Participating in PvP Conflict Zones yields monetary payouts in addition to weapon upgrades and other rewards. This is also a great place to test out some of the new gadgets and weaponry acquired from completing quests or dungeons. My personal favorite? The Incubator. This alien firearm shoots needles that do damage over time in addition to causing nasty bug-spawning polyps to protrude from the target's body.

A WORLD AT WAR



▲ Conflict Zones aren't the only place you'll encounter PvP—objective-based open-world engagements will be pretty frequent.

▲ *Defiance*'s world is rather huge, so you'll need a way to get around. Thankfully, you'll have access to your own personal quad.

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

DEFIANCE

INFO
Publisher: Trion Worlds
Developer: Trion Worlds
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
April 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 16v16 in Conflict Zones; open-world co-op and open-world conflict for "thousands"

GENRE
Third-person shooter/MMO

SUITABLE FOR
MMO fanatics looking for a sci-fi setting, wannabe TV stars

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Borderlands features similar RPG and loot mechanics in addition to a vast alien world to explore.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Defiance*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ An unprecedented attempt at merging games and television
- ❤ Expansive open world full of dungeons, quests, and loot

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Will there be enough depth to keep you engaged?
- ✖ If the show or game flops, will the other bite the dust?

3DS

RATING PENDING RP

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW–MIRROR OF FATE

Whip it good • Words: Lucas Sullivan

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW–MIRROR OF FATE

INFO
Publisher: Konami
Developer: MercurySteam
Platforms: 3DS

RELEASE DATE
TBD 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Platformer

SUITABLE FOR
Castlevania fans who're open to trying new things

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

The original *Lords of Shadow* on PS3 and Xbox 360 will catch you up on the new lore.

The Belmont boys are back—and they've got an undead bone to pick with Dracula. As the first *Castlevania* designed specifically for the 3DS, *Mirror of Fate* captures the essence of the classic side-scrolling whip-fests while infusing it with a fresh visual style.

Trevor Belmont, son of *Lords of Shadow*'s brooding protagonist Gabriel, is the game's leading vampire killer—but he's joined by three other characters, each with their own play style and motivation. There's Simon Belmont, the star of the original *Castlevania* games; Alucard, the *Symphony of the Night* alumni; and a mysterious fourth character who has yet to be officially revealed. They've all got their own weapons and fighting skills, but the overall concept is the same: You spend most of your time whipping, slashing, and swinging your way through Dracula's castle in hopes of sending him back to his coffin. The story will bridge the gap between *Lords of Shadows* and its upcoming console sequel, and offers a glimpse into the trials faced by the Belmont bloodline.

The majority of the action takes place on a 2D plane, but the gothic visuals have 3-D depth, making it feel like you're holding a living diorama. It's not all doom and gloom, either: Environments and enemies have an East-meets-West aesthetic, and each is adorned with a vibrant color scheme that looks great on the 3DS.

Castlevania's carved a niche for itself that could use some changing up, without straying too far from the source material. It looks like *Mirror of Fate* might be the breath of fresh air that the aging series needs—I can't wait to delve into Dracula's dominion in 2.5D.

▲ Simon Belmont sports a savage look this time around, but he's still packing his trusty leather whip and classic subweapons.

▲ Alucard, our favorite white-haired, sword-wielding pretty boy, is back to exact vengeance on his blood-sucking father.

▲ Can you really strangle a skeleton when his entire throat's rotted away? I'm not sure, but Trevor aims to try.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow–Mirror of Fate.*

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

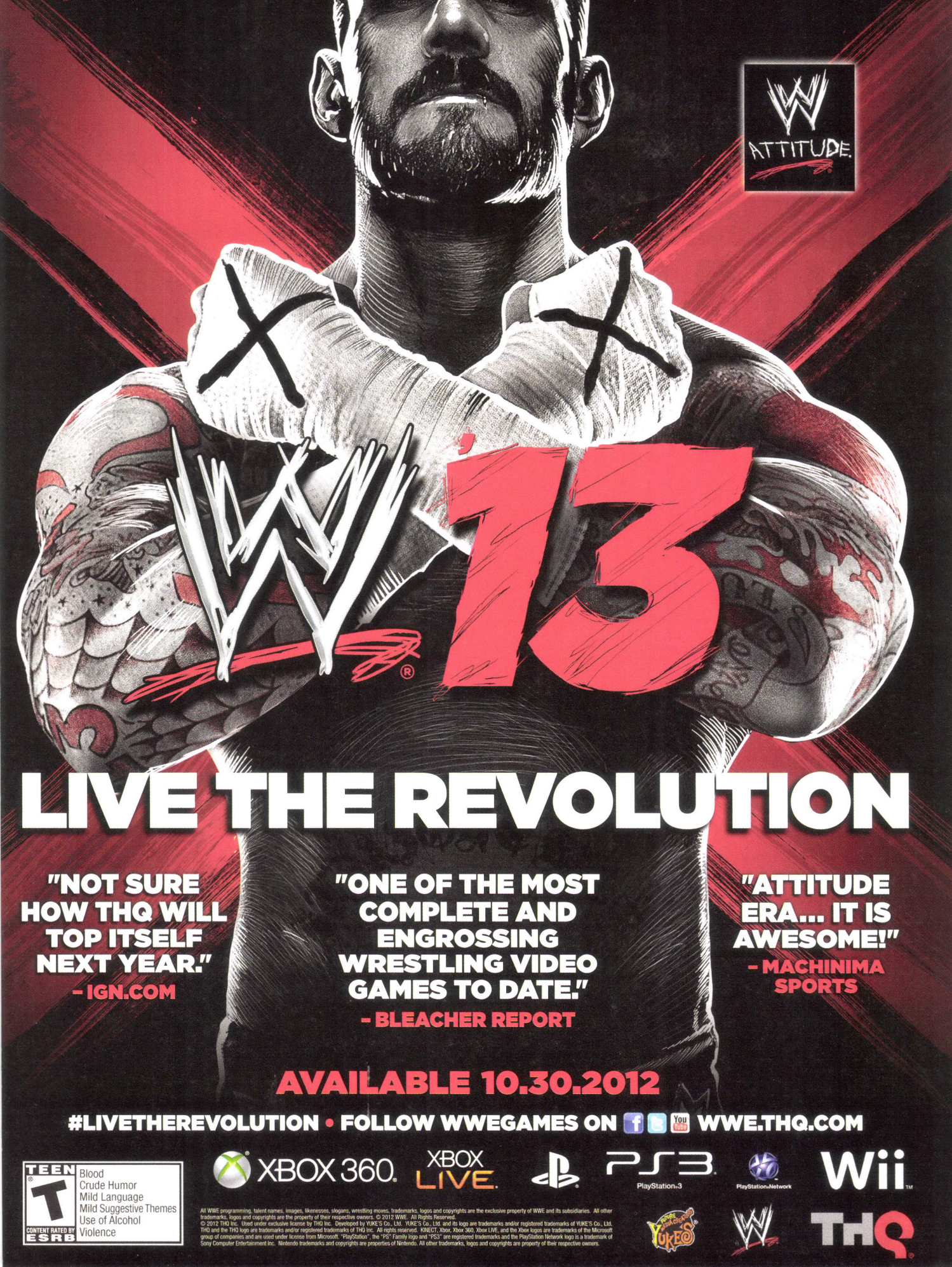
Trevor wields the same Combat Cross weapon that Gabriel brandished in *Lords of Shadow*, and it hasn't lost any of its undead-annihilating potency. This magic-imbued chain-link whip can shred enemies to bits with quick attacks, or can cover Trevor's back with broader swipes. Think of the Combat Cross as Whip 2.0.

WHAT'S GREAT:

- Classic *Castlevania* platforming with striking 2.5D graphics
- Multiple characters mean more variety

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- Getting lost in the castle's dark depths
- Finicky jumping segments


ATTITUDE.
'13
LIVE THE REVOLUTION
"NOT SURE HOW THQ WILL TOP ITSELF NEXT YEAR."
- IGN.COM
"ONE OF THE MOST COMPLETE AND ENGROSSING WRESTLING VIDEO GAMES TO DATE."
- BLEACHER REPORT
"ATTITUDE ERA... IT IS AWESOME!"
- MACHINIMA SPORTS
AVAILABLE 10.30.2012
#LIVETHEREVOLUTION • FOLLOW WWEGAMES ON WWE.THQ.COM
TEEN T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Crude Humor
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol
Violence
XBOX 360
XBOX LIVE
PS3
PlayStation 3
PlayStation Network
Wii
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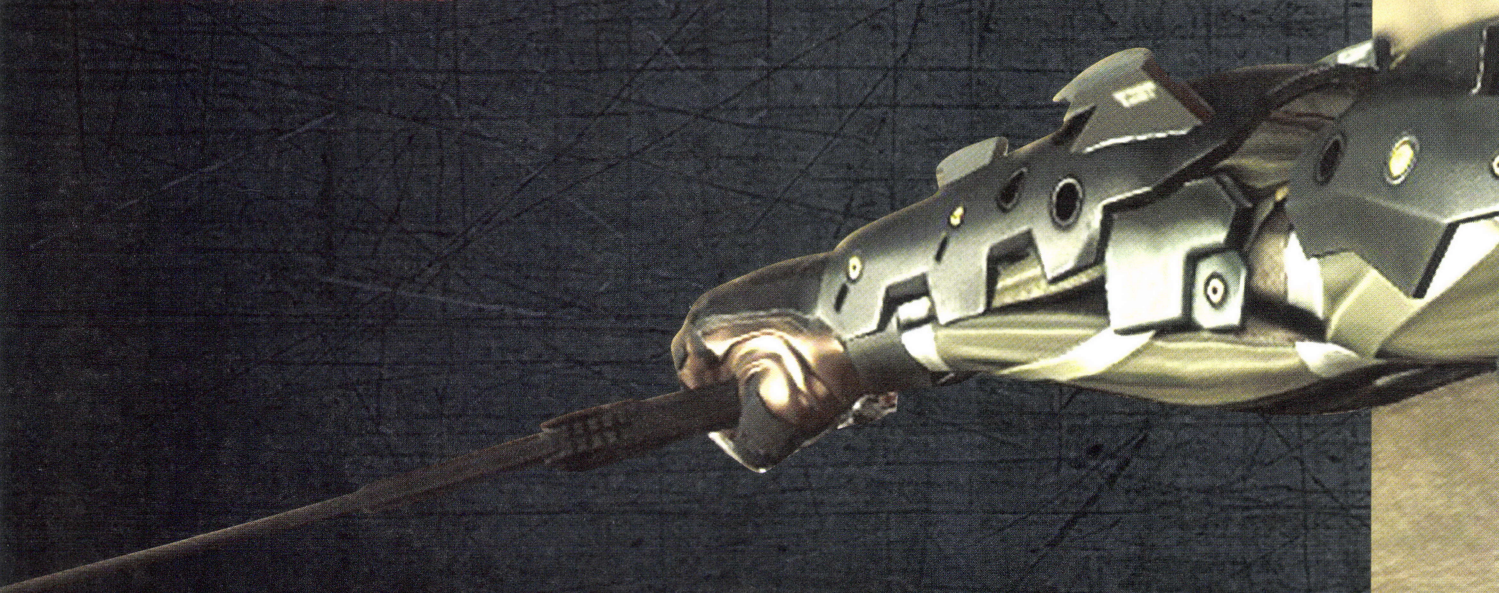
YUKE'S
THQ

METAL GEAR RISING: REVENGEANCE

TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION? MORE LIKE BRUTALLY INSANE CYBORG NINJA ACTION

WORDS: RYAN TAUBNICK



RAIDEN RETURNS
After being nearly killed by a mysterious enemy, Raiden dons his new black armor in his hunt for revenge...eance.

PARRY TIME
Learning to parry incoming attacks will be an essential tactic against the many cyborg enemies in *Revengeance*.

There's often a slight disconnect between actions depicted in fantastical cinematic sequences and actions you control in gameplay. Snake is usually a bit flashier taking down enemies in a cut-scene, for example, than when you make him do it in-game.

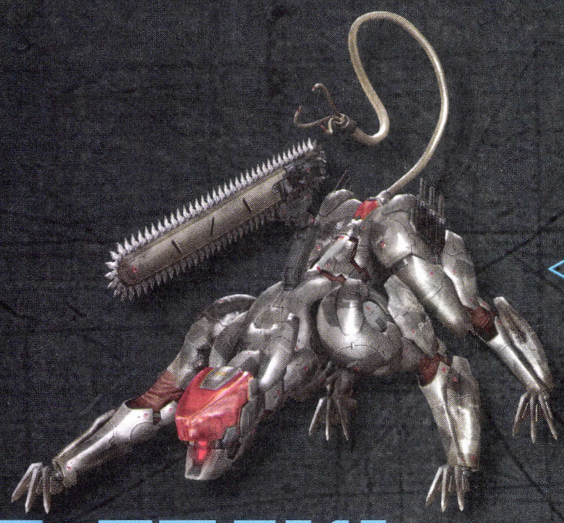
But *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*, an action game developed by Platinum Games in collaboration with Kojima Productions, is different in this regard. You won't just watch protagonist Raiden (the awesome cyborg ninja version from *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*) become a whirlwind of destruction, cutting enemies into pieces in over-the-top battles—you'll do all the cutting and whirlwinding yourself.

Playing *Revengeance* absolutely captures the jaw-dropping feeling that Raiden's cut-scenes in *MGS4* commands; he dances around the battlefield with blade in hand (and sometimes in foot), dominating anything that crosses his path with melodic precision. Blade Mode, the core mechanic of *Revengeance*, is the swordplay equivalent of staring down a firearm's iron sight. Here, time slows to a crawl, and you must "aim" Raiden's blade attacks. Flick the right analog stick and he'll slash in the direction of your input, slicing enemies—and even chunks of the environment—in half.

This granular control turns even the most basic battle into a spectacular display of Raiden's lightning-fast attacks and blade expertise. In a five-minute stretch of play, you might stealth kill (yes, stealth exists in *Revengeance*) some cyborgs, defeat enemies with stylish face-button combo attacks, or slice at the legs of a giant robotic Gekko via Blade Mode *while sliding underneath it*.

My demos of *Revengeance* have shown that it's already an astonishingly intelligent action game—but a recent trip to Kojima Productions and Platinum Games in Japan has proven that it is, without a doubt, a true *Metal Gear* game. Breaking the aforementioned stealth puts enemies in alert mode while exclamation points magically sprout from their heads; lengthy codec conversations sprinkled with humor provide context to your actions; and, perhaps most importantly, thematically unique bosses stand between you and victory.

Revengeance is a bold new entry in a beloved series, a game that is radically different—indeed, it's an entirely different *genre*—than its predecessors. Yet it feels so right in practice. Sure, it may alienate some longtime *Metal Gear* fans, but sometimes a transformation does more good than harm. Right, Raiden?



BLADEWOLF

Initially an enemy, LQ-84i (also known as Bladewolf) is defeated early on by Raiden and eventually becomes an ally. While the developers say this AI beast won't be joining you in combat, it will provide you with vital mission intel.

CAST & CREW

The key enemies Raiden will face in *Revengeance* are largely humans that became cyborgs by choice. Here are a few you can expect to encounter.

RAIDEN

Making his surprise debut as the rookie protagonist in *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*, Raiden is now a seasoned cyborg soldier. A run-in with Samuel (right) at the onset of *Revengeance* causes Raiden to lose his left eye and nearly perish in battle. He works for a private military company called Maverick Security Consulting.

SAMUEL

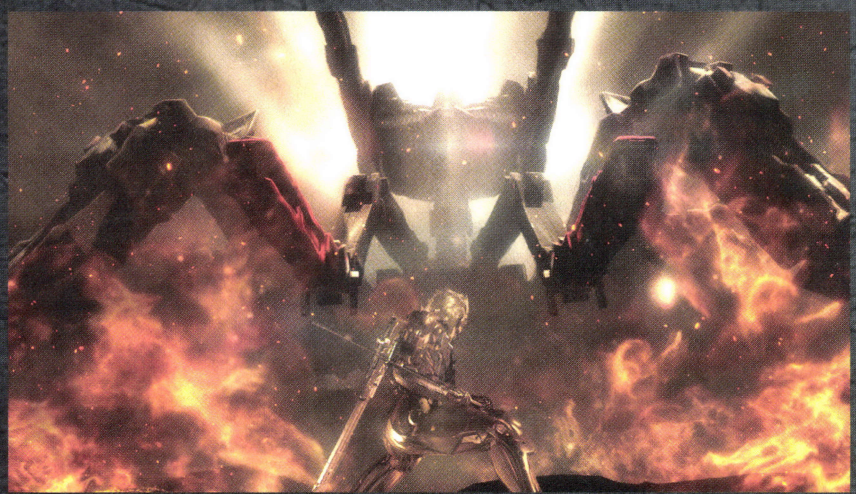
Sam is Raiden's greatest rival and employs a fighting style opposite that of his. Expect multiple encounters with this feared swordsman—taking him down will be no easy task. Sam, as well as the three characters on the next page, work for the PMC known as Desperado Enforcement.

SUNDOWNER
The supposed leader of Desperado Enforcement, Sundowner belongs to a trio of cyborgs called the "Winds of Destruction." He dual-wields swords and is armed with a large machete he calls "Bloodlust."
MONSOON
Another member of Winds of Destruction, Monsoon can break his body apart and reform it using magnets, allowing him to actively dodge sword strikes. He wields "Dystopia," a pair of deadly sai.
MISTRAL
This female cyborg is the third and final member of Winds of Destruction. She uses the arms of Dwarf Gekkos to give her an edge in combat, and can combine those arms to form her whip-like weapon, "Etranger."

A PMC LIFE

Set four years after the events of MGS4, Reveangance will be part of the series' official canon, detailing the transformation of PMCs from large guns-for-hire firms to smaller companies driven by widely available cyber-genetic technology.

Having had a child with his love interest Rosemary, another character from MGS2, Raiden joins Maverick Security Consulting in order to provide for his family. While he believes his involvement with this company is for the betterment of society (and, of course, his loved ones), an unfortunate run-in with members of Desperado Enforcement, a rival PMC involved in terrorist activities, leaves him grievously injured—and hungry for payback. Now equipped with new, powerful black armor, Raiden sets off for retribution.



COLOSSAL ENCOUNTERS

During my demos, I saw Raiden take on more than just cyborgs—he went toe-to-toe with Metal Gears themselves. These explosion-heavy battles often require you to slice the armor off a machine before attacking its weak points.

GEARED FOR BATTLE

In addition to his high-frequency (HF) blade, Raiden will have access to a wide variety of equipment during his missions. Secondary weapons such as grenades and rocket launchers can be found on-site and are handy for taking on large groups of enemies. Meanwhile, defeating certain bosses means you'll obtain their weapons *Mega Man*–style.

Raiden's Augment Mode (seen above) lets you scan each environment, highlighting enemies and destructible bits of the environment. From here, you can choose how to approach each situation, either by taking enemies out undetected or running in sword drawn. Regardless of how you inevitably chop bad guys into bits, you'll be rewarded for doing so in the form of an upgrade resource called parts. Turning parts over to one of Raiden's contacts at Maverick Securities allows you to upgrade your weaponry—and while I didn't see this system in action, I'd be willing to wager that you can also upgrade Raiden's cyborg circuitry to make him stronger and unlock more attack combos.

Such upgrades will undoubtedly come in handy for completionists, as finishing a mission presents a stage-clear screen that details your completion time, number of enemies killed, and other stats before ranking your performance. I've got a feeling that nailing an "S" rank across the board will be extremely challenging.

RAIDEN WILL HAVE ACCESS TO A WIDE VARIETY OF EQUIPMENT

▲"What kind of shampoo do you use? Your hair is so...shiny."

▲The characters above belong to Raiden's PMC—they're your mission support team.

▲Chopping off enemies' left hands via Blade Mode yields extra parts for upgrades.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS

METAL GEAR RISING: REVENGEANCE

INFO
Publisher: Konami
Developer: Platinum Games / Kojima Productions
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
February 19, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Lovers of swords and cyborgs

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Vanquish will give you a taste of Platinum's high-speed action game design.

HANDS-ON

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Some of the best action combat I've ever seen in a game
- ❤ A *Metal Gear* title starring Raiden in cyborg form
- ❤ Manages to retain traditional *Metal Gear* elements while still being something new

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Will it be as deep as previous *Metal Gear* games?

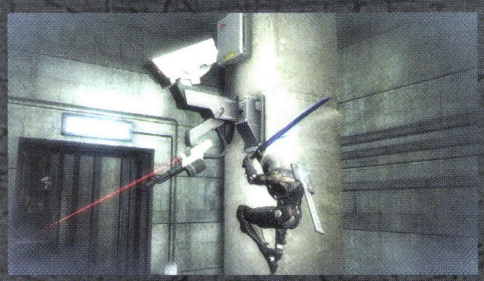
CROSSING SWORDS

The story of *Metal Gear Solid: Rising*'s transformation into *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* is one of near-cancellation and mixed emotions. Kojima Productions' original idea for a Metal Gear game starring Raiden and built around a new cutting mechanic was announced in 2009 but then quietly cancelled in 2010.

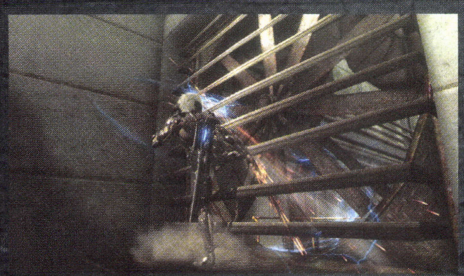
"When *Metal Gear Solid: Rising* was being developed in-house, the script was finished, the bosses—their concept—was finished, and the design was finished with those levels," says producer Yuji Korekado of Kojima Productions. "The levels were to a point where we could play them through in a white box, but we couldn't come up with a core concept—so with all those models that we had for the bosses, and the finished script, we couldn't finish the game."

Metal Gear guru Hideo Kojima then approached Atsushi Inaba of Platinum Games and asked him to take over the project. Kojima Productions now oversees the story and cut-scenes, ensuring it remains true to the franchise, while Platinum Games is responsible for the development process.

KOJIMA PROD. NOW OVERSEES THE GAME'S STORY AND CUT-SCENES



▲ Chopping security cameras into pieces is a good way to stay hidden.



▲ Every level in *Revengeance* has sections that can be destroyed.

▲ Boss battles are epic encounters full of explosive action and changing environments.

INTERVIEWS

Developers from Kojima Productions and Platinum Games talk about their experience working on Revengeance.

KENJI SAITO

CREATIVE DIRECTOR (PLATINUM GAMES)

When Raiden was revealed in MGS2, what was your reaction? What has Platinum Games added to the character since?

When I first played MGS2 and saw Raiden, I thought, who is this character that pops out after Snake? He was a character that didn't really stand out to me. I love MGS2—just to make that official. I believe that [with] Raiden in *Revengeance*, you can see his growth. His stance is different in life. He's a father, many things have changed since MGS2. All that included, Raiden's a different character now, with a little bit of the personality he had from MGS2.

Metal Gear is a series of iconic moments. Which are the most iconic for you, and how have you referenced them in Revengeance?

When you think of iconic things, literally you think of the icon—the exclamation mark [when enemies are alerted].That's something we definitely wanted to put in.

As a collaborative project, how much freedom do you have to inject Platinum Games' personality into Revengeance?

As far as flexibility, Kojima Studios looks over the game writing, the storytelling, and the direction for the cut-scenes. Platinum Games looks over the entire game and the design of it. There's a lot of input from both sides, but we believe there's a lot of flexibility in us saying what we want to do in some of the storytelling, depending on the design of the game.

ATSUSHI INABA

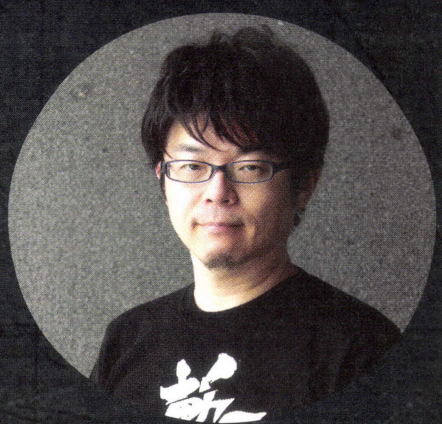
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PLATINUM GAMES)

Platinum Games has found moderate success in the West with games such as *Bayonetta* and *Vanquish*. Why do you think this the case when some other Japanese developers are struggling?

I believe the first reason is that we specialize in action games. The dialog is spoken in action. You touch the controller, and if [a game] sucks, it sucks. But if it feels good, it's a good game. I think, worldwide, everyone feels the same about that. The second reason is that there was a time when Westerners thought that just because a game came from Japan that it would sell. At the time, a lot of those [Japanese] studios slacked off in development and creativity. Platinum Games kept up the motivation and technology. We think of ourselves as a global studio.

Having worked with Kojima Productions, how does their design philosophy differ from that of Platinum Games?

One big difference that I believe all of our staff working on the game believe is that Kojima Productions is too detailed when it comes to settings. They're precise, and their [keen] eyes when they're looking at each game setting and mechanic is something that Platinum Games has never experienced—it's not necessarily a bad thing. We believe that that keen eye, to look at things [in a very detailed way], has made our staff a lot better. That experience we can take back and help us, even for our games in the future.



YUJI KOREKADO

PRODUCER (KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS)

What's the vibe like at Kojima Productions now that this project—which wasn't going well internally—is somewhere else?

When Kojima Productions decided to send the game over to Platinum Games, it was definitely a dark time for some of those guys who had worked on the game. They put a lot of effort into it and a lot of time into it. For me, when Platinum Games visited the studio to get an update on the progress of the game that was done internally [up to that time], I was asked by Mr. Kojima to present the status...and I knew that Platinum Games would probably be taking over the game.

It was a very complicated emotion inside of me. I wanted to keep creating the game internally, but Mr. Kojima wanted to move it forward and develop it outside. It was very frustrating, but something I had to move forward with in my life and career. Even now I remember that feeling of giving that presentation with mixed thoughts and feelings. That was something all of the staff felt at Kojima Productions who worked on the game at the time.

Fortunately, I was able to participate in the development and management of *Revengeance* even when it went to Platinum Games. At the time, I wasn't sure—before we gave it to Platinum Games—if *Rising* would be published and be enjoyed by the fans. When I found out I would be able to participate and put it out to the fans, I cut off all the sour feelings I had and moved forward. Everything worked out.

NINTENDO

NINTENDO IS BOLDLY STEPPING INTO THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSOLE HARDWARE

Wii U

The gaming veteran launches the first "next-gen" salvo

• Words: Andy Eddy

It doesn't happen often, which is what gets gamers so excited: Nintendo is launching a new videogame system soon. And it's stepping boldly into the next generation of game-console hardware ahead of Microsoft and Sony.

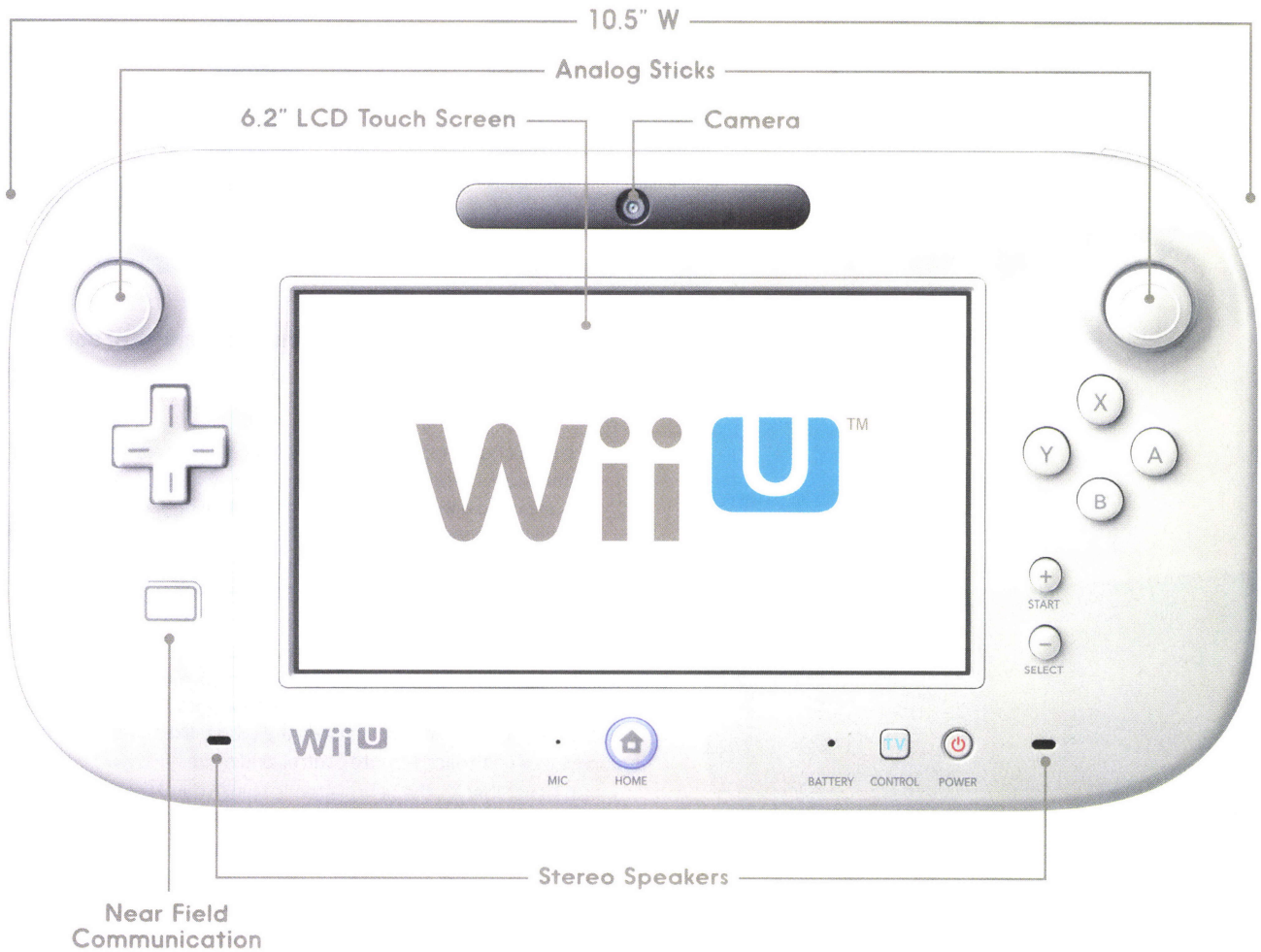
The Wii U jumps off from what Wii owners already have—and, in fact, it will use the same Wii Remote and Nunchuk controllers they already own, as well as being backward compatible with, according to Nintendo, "nearly all Wii software and accessories." However, the new console adds HD visuals (up to 1080p), more integrated entertainment options, and other fresh elements. Perhaps the most interesting and versatile inclusion is the tablet-like GamePad that serves as a controller, remote control, and more.

On November 18, the new system's launch day, Nintendo will have two bundles available for consumers. The $299.99 all-white Basic Set includes the Wii U console with 8GB of internal storage, a GamePad, and other essentials: a GamePad stylus, a sensor bar, AC adapters for the console and GamePad, and an HDMI cable. I'm not sure why anyone would buy the Basic Set when, for just $50 more, gamers can get the Deluxe Set, which has all of the same elements of the Basic Set (though in all-black) and adds a console with 32GB of internal storage, a copy of *Nintendo Land*, stands for the console and GamePad, a cradle for the GamePad, and a "deluxe digital promotion," which Nintendo says will give owners points for digital downloads that can be redeemed for eShop purchases.

What follows is a preview of the key components, features, and software we've had a chance to look over. And don't miss out on the December issue of @GAMER, where we'll have reviews of the Wii U hardware and the first wave of software.

GAMEPAD

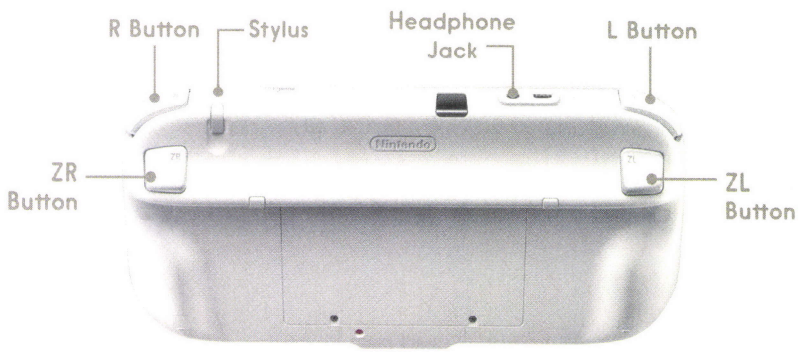
{Sometimes it's a controller...sometimes it's a handheld system}



Wii U GAMEPAD

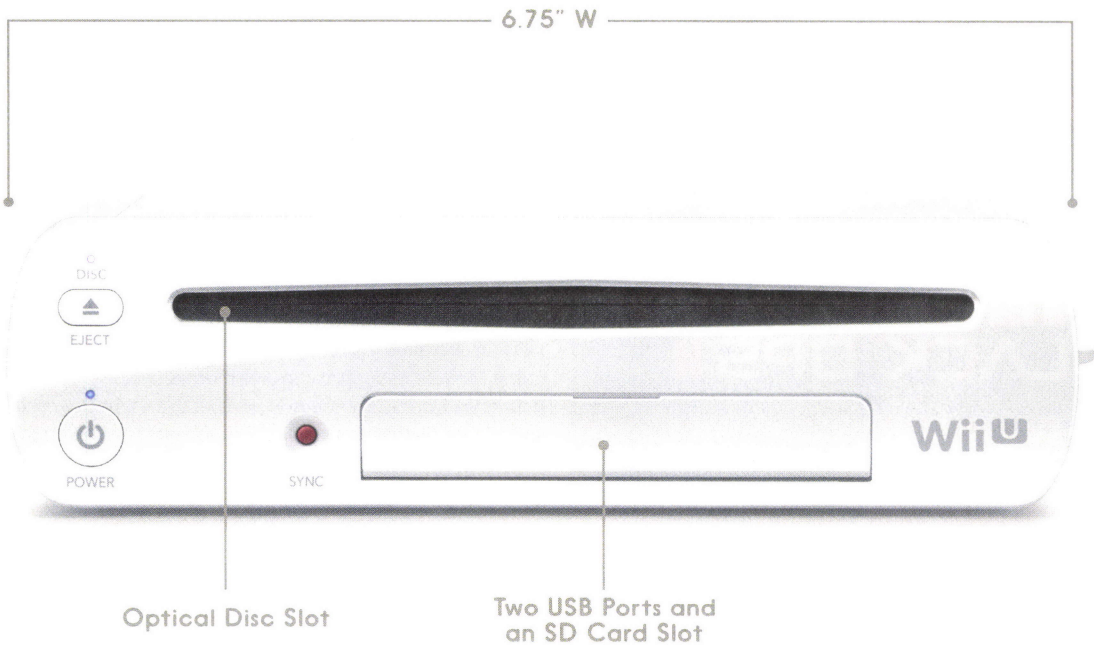
This tablet-like controller is the Wii U's gem. It features an accelerometer and gyroscope for Wii-like motion-control gaming, and a rechargeable lithium-ion battery for lengthy wireless sessions.

Interesting additions include Near Field Communication (NFC) support, which some mobile phones use to share info or make digital-wallet payments, and an Accessory Jack (not shown) on the GamePad's underside that will enable connection to other devices. What devices? We'll have to wait and see.



CONSOLE

{It's behind the scenes, but not behind the curve}



Wii U CONSOLE

Generally, the console itself will sit untouched on the shelf, but you should be aware—especially if you're a hardware nerd—of the power it has under its shiny hood:

- According to Nintendo, the Wii U console is powered by an "IBM Power-based multicore processor" and an "AMD Radeon-based high-definition GPU."
- You can buy a console with 8GB or 32GB of internal data storage, but Nintendo also says that you'll be able to add more storage using one of the system's USB ports (there are two in the front and two in the back).
- Nintendo says that "in the future, the Wii U console will support...two Wii U GamePad controllers." However, in a recent interview, the company said you won't be able to buy—and no games will even support—a second GamePad until sometime in 2013.

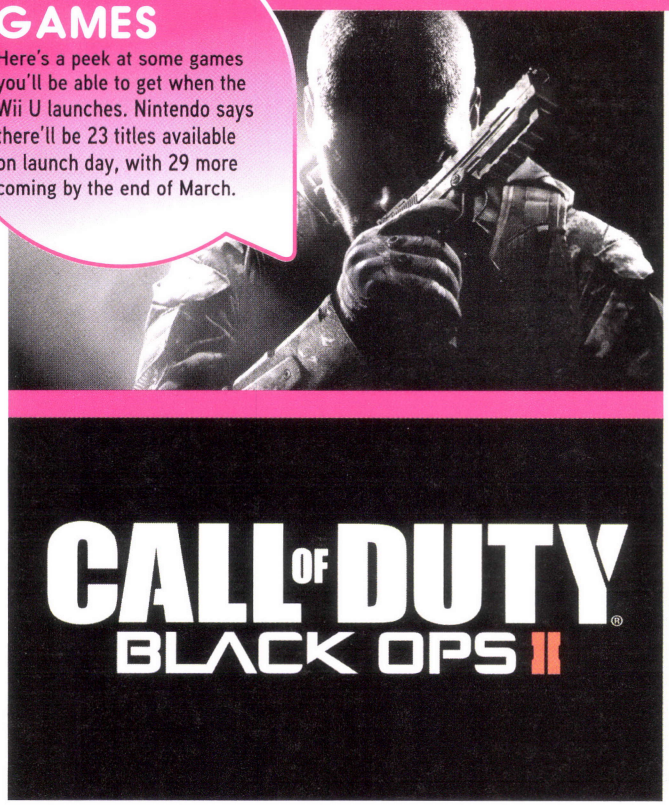
Wii U PRO CONTROLLER

After going less traditional with the Wii Remote's size and shape, it seems Nintendo has at least conceded it needs a control pad... even if it's an optional accessory.

As you can see, the Pro Controller will enable elaborate control over your gameplay, and it made smooth work of our *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* tryout.

GAMES

Here's a peek at some games you'll be able to get when the Wii U launches. Nintendo says there'll be 23 titles available on launch day, with 29 more coming by the end of March.



CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS II

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Treyarch • Genre: First-person shooter

What is it? From what I saw in a recent demo, the Wii U version plays just the same as the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions, especially if you use a Wii U Pro Controller. It includes all of the game's enhancements, such as Score Streaks, more versatile Create-a-Class, eSports action through ranked League Play, and full access to Theater editing. Most of all, *Black Ops II* is a good demonstration of the console's HD capabilities, and should get a lot of gamers—such as the ones who'll be holding off on buying a Wii U when it launches—to change their minds about adding Nintendo's new console to their living rooms.

GamePad Functionality? *Black Ops II* is probably also one of the best examples of how the GamePad enables vast versatility. If you're a solo player, the GamePad provides a supplementary screen that enables quick, one-touch selection of weapons, Score Streak rewards, and previously created loadouts, as well as allowing you to view an overhead multiplayer map. If you have two players on the same console, though, it can give them respective views of their gameplay from a first-person perspective—a better option to being splitscreen on the same monitor—with one viewing on the main monitor and the other on the GamePad.

▼ Extra content for free? Yes, please...

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

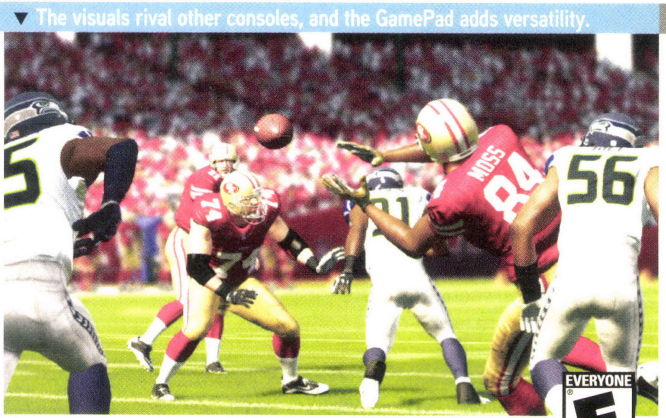
DARKSIDERS II

Publisher: THQ • Developer: Vigil Games • Genre: Action-RPG

What is it? Once again, here's a game that looks exactly like its HD-console counterparts. If the next question is, "If it looks the same, why would I want the Wii U version?" the answer is, because the Wii U version will also come with *Darksiders II*'s first "Argul's Tomb" DLC and other bonuses on the disc without extra cost.

GamePad Functionality? The second screen enables you to get quicker access to loot and your inventory, without having to pause your game. Additionally, you'll be able to trigger some moves using the GamePad's motion-sensing controls.

▼ The visuals rival other consoles, and the GamePad adds versatility.



EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

MADDEN NFL 13

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: EA Tiburon • Genre: Sports

What is it? The Wii U version will sport the same features that this year's update brought to the other consoles, including high-res graphics, more realistic player collisions and reactions, and even the "Connected Career," which can be managed from other Internet-linked devices.

GamePad Functionality? The GamePad may offer something *Madden* players have been anxious for: a way to call plays, signal an audible at the line of scrimmage, and change receiver routes or defensive assignments without effort—and certainly without tipping off your opponent.

▼ "What I could use now is a helping hand..."

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. U

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Nintendo • Genre: Platformer

What is it? There's nothing like the vibrant visuals in a *Mario* game world, and the Wii U doesn't disappoint with even smoother animation and more brilliant colors on display. The Wii U version will also offer multiple gameplay modes and action for up to five players.

GamePad Functionality? The GamePad's touch screen gives special powers to the holder. For instance, you'll be able to add and remove platforms and interfere with enemies by tapping on them. It'll also force teams to collaborate that much more in order to achieve the best time in a speed run.

▼ Ever had a dream where Mario was a buff combo fighter? It's here...

TEKKEN TAG TOURNAMENT 2 WII U EDITION

Publisher: Namco Bandai • Developer: Namco Bandai • Genre: Fighting

What is it? Wii U owners are getting the first *Tekken* game to grace a Nintendo console, and they'll also have a special Mushroom Battle mode where power-ups are strewn around the arena.

GamePad Functionality? I'm not much for fighting games, mainly because, as a casual player, remembering moves and combos is tough. Being able to access move lists and combos on the touch screen seems like it'll be a big help...though I'll probably still be beaten to a pulp in my matches.

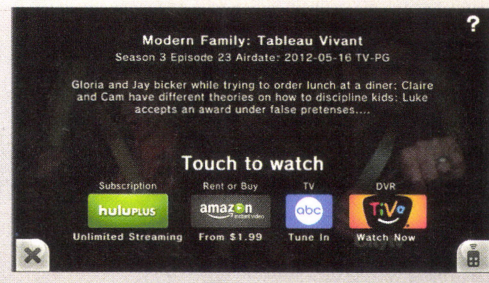
NintendoTVii

A MEATY MEDIA MANAGER

What Nintendo has shown of its TVii tech proved the Wii U is much more than a game console. It's an entertainment conduit that can pull programs from many places. It also enables collaborative social media between friends watching the same show.

And, hey, the GamePad can also be used as a universal TV remote, so you'll be able to lessen the number of devices in your living room.

LET COUCH COMBAT BEGIN



▲ **INTEGRATE** A search will look for programs on various Internet-based sources, such as Hulu Plus, but it can also check out what's on your TiVo DVR.

▲ **SPECTATE** Sports viewers will start with a full scoreboard of games, then can drill down to watch individual games and comment on them with friends.

▼ Pikmin Adventure is an "everyone against the bad guys" co-op battle.

▼ *Nintendo Land* shines when there are five players competing.

NINTENDO LAND

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Nintendo • Genre: Party/various

What is it? Nintendo wants you to think of the *Nintendo Land* game as a big theme park of attractions, and indeed it offers a wide variety of gameplay for up to five players across a dozen different activities. Of course, being the "bundled-in" game for those who purchase the Deluxe Set, that means a lot of people will be playing it. Nintendo has been holding back a little, so we don't know what all of the attractions will offer, but there's a mix of gameplay—some competitive, some cooperative, and all featuring Nintendo's iconic characters as your in-game surrogates.

It's also hard to categorize *Nintendo Land*, because it crosses numerous genres, including a puzzle-like obstacle course, a first-person battle on rails, and a hide-and-seek-like chase, among others.

GamePad Functionality? Many of the inventive *Nintendo Land* attractions feature one player on a GamePad, while others use Wii Remotes to control their characters. In Metroid Blast, for instance, the GamePad player battles from an airship, while the others control ground-based fighters; the airship can pick up ground fighters for added aerial firepower. In Mario Chase, however, the Wii Remote-based players all collaborate to find and eventually tackle the GamePad-controlled Mario as he runs around a maze (and can view the whole playfield on the second screen thanks to an overhead map).

▼ Being on fire seems like the "in thing" to do, but it's not.

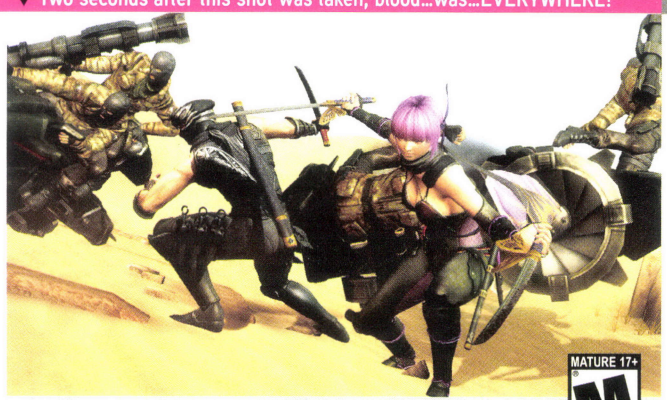
SONIC & ALL STARS RACING TRANSFORMED

Publisher: Sega • Developer: Sumo Digital • Genre: Racing

What is it? The Wii U version of this racer will be packed with action and competition on land and sea. In typical "karting" style, you'll be able to grab power-ups to enhance your weaponry.

GamePad Functionality? Here's a cool twist: If you raise up the GamePad while you're playing, the second screen shows a "picture-in-picture" rear-view mirror display that enables you to better aim your rear-facing weapon. And if you want to free up your TV, you'll be able to play the game on the GamePad.

▼ Two seconds after this shot was taken, blood...was...EVERYWHERE!



NINJA GAIDEN 3: RAZOR'S EDGE

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Team Ninja/Tecmo Koei • Genre: Action

What is it? Here's one that may actually be better than other console versions, and the fact that Nintendo is publishing it indicates its faith in attracting an audience. *Razor's Edge* goes back to the traditional *Ninja Gaiden* style, meaning it's going to be tough, with improved enemy AI for better battles—but also increased bloodshed and dismemberment.

GamePad Functionality? You'll be able to scroll through and select available combos and ninja skills on the second screen.

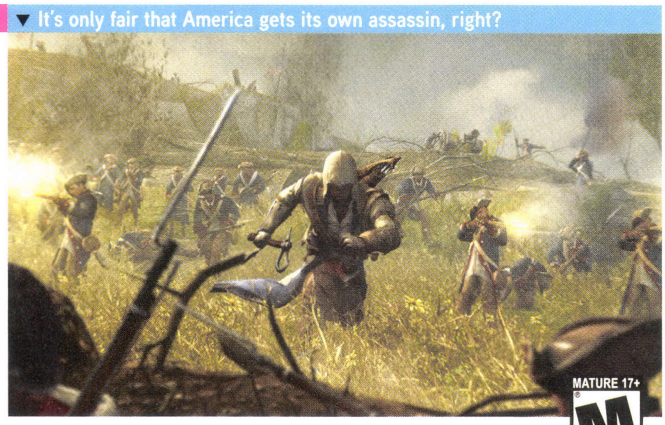
▼ The premise is the same, but *Giants* brings lots of enhancements.

SKYLANDER GIANTS

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Vicarious Visions • Genre: Action-RPG

What is it? Activision brings its second-generation combat game to the Wii U, and it'll sport the same features as other platforms, including new Skylanders characters (though you can use your old ones here as well) and an increased level cap.
GamePad Functionality? Serious Skylanders players keep track of their characters' stats, and the Wii U version enables you to check the numbers without having to break from the game, with changes displayed in real time.

▼ It's only fair that America gets its own assassin, right?



ASSASSIN'S CREED III

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft Québec • Genre: Action-adventure

What is it? The assassin adventure comes to our shores, with the setting of an unsettled nation on the verge of independence. You play as Connor, a Native American who doesn't really play one side or the other—he simply goes against any wrongdoer. And the America Revolution gives him no shortage of targets.
GamePad Functionality? Having an overhead map available at all times makes it easier to track the bad guys, and you'll have even faster access to your weapon wheel when you need to switch.

ALSO COMING SOON...

NEAR U

A RAPIDLY GROWING LIBRARY

Over the next four months, Nintendo will bring a mix of familiar game names and fresh Wii U–only titles to store shelves for you to choose from.

ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

Sega's action game features single-player, multiplayer, and co-op gameplay—and plenty of startling creatures popping up.

GAME & WARIO

Wii U quickly gets its first *WarioWare*-style collection of microgames offering fast-paced action for up to five players.

LEGO CITY: UNDERCOVER

You're Chase McCain, a detective and master of disguises. The GamePad is your investigative tool. Weed out the bad studs.

MARVEL AVENGERS: BATTLE FOR EARTH

Nothing seems more natural than nearly two dozen comic superheroes duking it out.

MASS EFFECT 3

Shepard returns to wrestle Earth from the hands of evildoers. The Wii U version features bonus content out of the box.

RAYMAN LEGENDS

You can plan on hours of platforming fun, and the side-splitting five-player co-op will challenge and entertain you.

WII FIT U

The next installment of the popular exercise series offers more than 20 activities for a calorie-burning blend of fun and fitness.

THE WONDERFUL 101

Platinum Games and Nintendo team for a unique game that asks you to build a hero army and save Earth from alien invasion.

@GAMER
DIGITAL EDITION

MORE SCREENS
01 SEARCH
IN-GAME ARTWORK
We have pulled the best screenshots from our archives.
NVIDIA 3D VISION
MAX PAYNE 3 STILL FINDS TIME TO SPIN A DRAMATIC YARN
TAP TO PREORDER
BUY NOW!
Read the preview and now you're ready to buy the game? Here you go.
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Game trailers and quick updates from the editors.
Qosmio
harman/kardon
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ASSASSIN'S CREED III
NEW ASSASSIN, NEW WEAPONS, NEW WORLD
Resident Evil 6, Borderlands 2
Halo 4 Campaign Details Exposed!
Today's Best Sports Games

TOP PICKS

RATINGS BREAKDOWN:

@GAMER includes only the best games in our Top Picks section. If you don't see it here, it's probably not worth getting.

- An average game. Just worthy enough to call to your attention.
- A good game with some flaws. Fans of the genre will probably enjoy it.
- An excellent game that we strongly recommend.
- A near-perfect gaming experience

62
HALO 4

Hey, meet the crew!

@GAMER wants you to know about the best-of-the-best games out now or coming soon, so we've put together a different kind of Geek Squad to help you out.

This month, we ask the gamer panel:

What game are you most thankful for this year?

Matt Cabral

I'm most thankful for *Borderlands 2*, which allowed me to bond with friends and family over the common goal of shooting mutant psychos in their ugly, ugly faces.

Hilary Goldstein

I'm thankful to have Master Chief back in action. We've gone too long without the Xbox's big star. Not so bad having Cortana speaking softly in my ear, either.

Andrew Hayward

Mark of the Ninja. Klei's masterful Xbox Live Arcade (and now PC) affair is a pitch-perfect stealth adventure that excels in every respect. It's really remarkable!

Timothy J. Seppala

When I give thanks this year, I'll be most thankful for *Dishonored*. It isn't often we get original games as good as this. Plus, I have a soft spot for rats. And whales.

TOP PICKS

58 ASSASSIN'S CREED III
62 HALO 4
66 WORLD OF WARCRAFT: MISTS OF PANDARIA
68 DISHONORED
70 XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN
74 NEED FOR SPEED MOST WANTED
75 FORZA HORIZON
76 ASSASSIN'S CREED III LIBERATION
77 FABLE: THE JOURNEY
79 POKÉMON BLACK/WHITE 2
80 SKYLANDERS GIANTS
81 WWE '13

MINI-REVIEWS

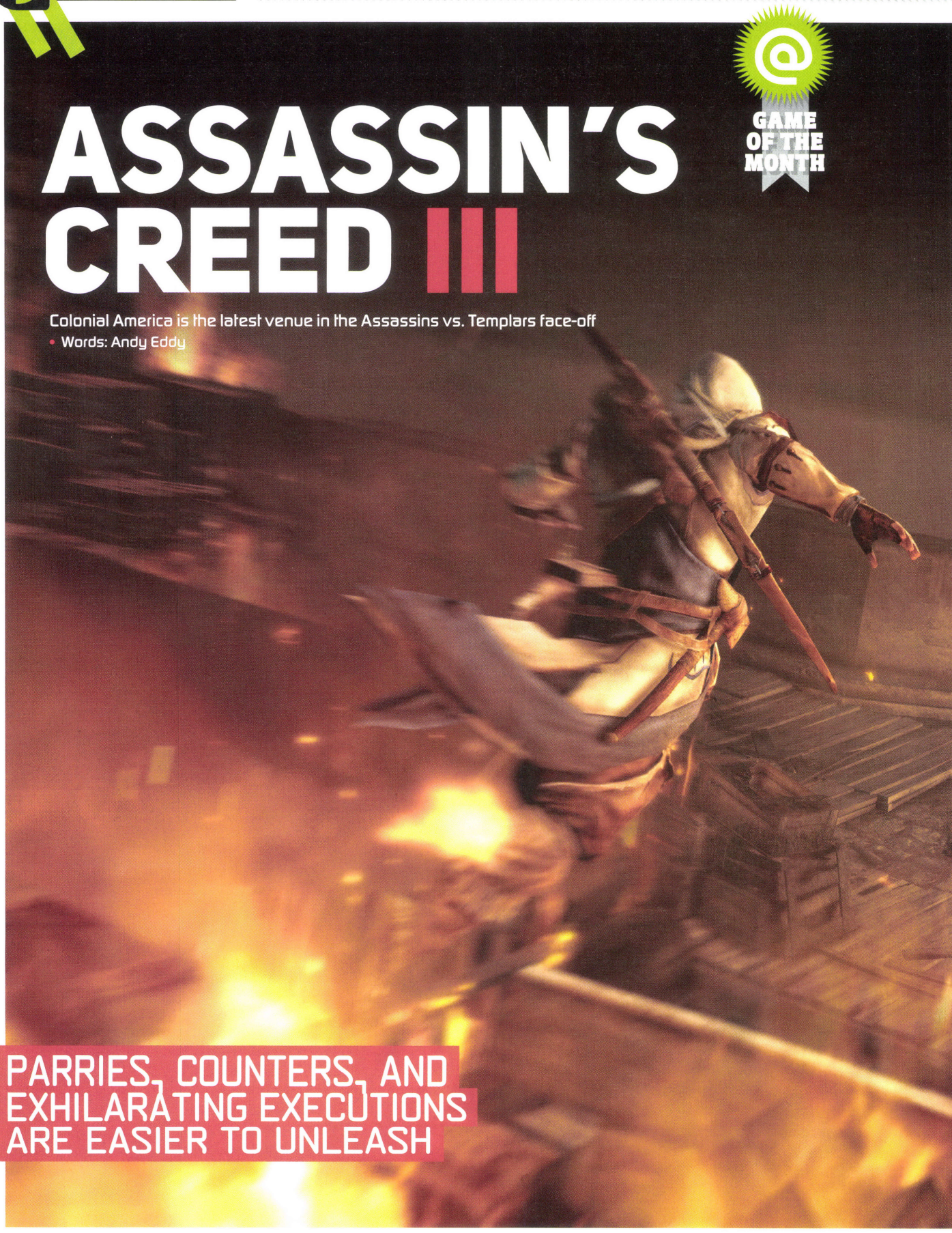
82 Just Dance 4
82 NASCAR The Game: Inside Line
83 The Testament of Sherlock Holmes

NOT PICKS

The following game did not make the *@GAMER* cut:

ThunderCats (reviewed on DS): "You don't need sight beyond sight to see that *ThunderCats* is a tedious, uninspired, poorly constructed beat-em-up."—*Alexandra Hall*

RollerCoaster Tycoon 3D (reviewed on 3DS): "Stingy park construction limits and the lack of granular control makes it feel like a boring shell of the series' inventive past outings."—*Ryan Taljonick*



GAME OF THE MONTH

ASSASSIN'S CREED III

Colonial America is the latest venue in the Assassins vs. Templars face-off

• Words: Andy Eddy

PARRIES, COUNTERS, AND EXHILARATING EXECUTIONS ARE EASIER TO UNLEASH

Whenever I get my hands on a sequel, I first look to see what's stayed somewhat the same and what's substantially changed. *Assassin's Creed III* delivers a lot of comfortable sameness, such as synchronizing locations in order to expand the viewable map. It also continues the running storyline from where *AC Revelations* left off: You're Desmond Miles, a guy whose distant ancestors were assassins and who's teamed up to "replay" past memories for clues to thwart the Templars' current-day evil plotting.

As for changes, the main ones are with the time, location, and main protagonist: Pre-independence America serves as the primary stage for this adventure, and boy-to-man Connor is the lead actor through the meat of the game, though it takes a while before you get to play as (or even see) him.

Another sizable (and welcome) change has come to the combat, which is similar to previous AC titles, but with parries, counters, and exhilarating executions easier to unleash and link, thanks to a generous pause in the fight being your cue for a button press. Movement controls are also similar, though without the need for simultaneous button and trigger holds, providing a better sense of being "locked" to the terrain when you're climbing cliff faces and scampering through trees.

For its first third, AC3 plods along, forcing you to become well-established in its story and the New England terrain, which keeps the action to a relatively dull buzz. When "fast travel" kicks in about halfway through, so does your fun factor.

By the time you get to whip a mount into a gallop, this figurative horse of a game also hits its stride, offering you hours of story missions and side activities to complete. The combat becomes more challenging and you face more adversity as the historical and sci-fi elements get closer to their climax. Despite its early pacing issues and minor foibles, AC3 is another entry in the franchise that takes you on a wild ride.

▲ Combat is easier, but you can also disengage from any battle by simply running. Escaping, though...that's hard.

▲ *AC3* enables you to cool your heels—and maybe earn some profit—playing games against AI characters.

NAVAL GAZING \\

Between the single-player campaign and returning and new multiplayer modes, AC3 offers you a crazy number of different things to do. There's nothing so fresh as the naval battles you can engage in on the open water. It's a whole new gameplay mechanic—and one that'll take some time to master.

First, you have to pay attention to the ship's speed, though there are only three "settings"—full sail, half sail, and stop. And then there's the time it takes to bring a ship that size around in a turn, while watching for rocks and sandbars in your vicinity. Got those covered? Good...now line up some cannon and gun shots on the enemy fleet, and yell for your crew to take cover now and again to minimize your ship and manpower losses.

01 ODD MAN OUT
In Wanted mode, the object is "kill before you're killed." This guy is missing out...but is about to change that.

02 AGGRESSOR
It looks like he's avoided getting killed here—and the one who makes the first move, often comes out ahead.

03 LET US PREY
It's safe to say Mr. 01 is about to get a kill. Will it be the stunned Mr. 03 or Mr. 02 with his back to a pursuer?

DEADLY DOLL
Don't be lured by her "come hither" eyes. She's not satisfied until your blood spills.

AC3 OFFERS YOU A CRAZY NUMBER OF DIFFERENT THINGS TO DO

CONTROL FREAKS \\

The new Domination multiplayer mode sets up two teams to battle over three control points, with momentum frequently seesawing back and forth. It's obvious that you're on the offensive when you venture into the perimeter of an enemy holding, but well-timed use of abilities can help you to survive.

SCREEN
Watch for uncommon behavior: AI doesn't sprint and doesn't take to the roof.

▲ Hunting gets you pelts and other salable items, which can be sold to a merchant or traded internationally.

▲ Deathmatch mode puts everyone on a tight map, each with a unique character model. Much death ensues.

NOT FOR LONERS

"Wait a second...could it be?"

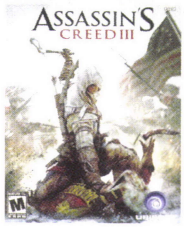
STOP, COLLABORATE AND LISTEN

I'm perhaps most excited to spend some more time in the new Wolf Pack mode. Here, up to four players—though it can be played solo—collaborate to take out one group of targets after another. You're up against a timer, but you can extend the remaining time by scoring more points and racking up big bonuses. Working together to coordinate multi-kills (where all targets are killed at the same time) and maximizing your score by using special techniques (such as killing from a blend) makes the difference between running out of time or getting to run across the map for the next set of targets.

I've played Wolf Pack a few times in the last couple of months, and each time brought an "okay, one more time...I think we can do better" kind of feeling. And that was just playing the first of the three difficulties that the mode offers.

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii U PC

GAME DETAILS



ASSASSIN'S CREED III

INFO
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal, Ubisoft Annecy
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC (also on Wii U)
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
October 30, 2012 (Wii U: November 18, 2012)

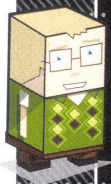
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8-player online

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Those with a revolutionary plan and the means to hatchet

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Simplified controls have you unexpectedly leaping to your death less
- ❤ Naval battles give you different muscles to flex

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ You'll still unexpectedly leap to your death on occasion
- ✖ So. Much. Running.
- ✖ Connor's indignation gets old



RYAN SAYS:
When I first went to New York for the reveal of *AC3*, I instantly fell in love. I can't wait to jump in and slay some Templars!

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

Spartan
Yes, the armor looks awesome, and you can also customize it.

Crawler
You're going to want to shoot these bad boys in the face.

HALO 4 IS THE SHINIEST—AND MOST GRUESOME—ENTRY IN THE SERIES

HALO 4

Don't underestimate Master Chief

• Words: Jack DeVries

It's been four long years since Master Chief saved the galaxy (again!) in *Halo 3*, and he's been stuck in cryo-sleep while we've been playing *Halo* spin-offs. But if you think a Spartan would be rusty after drifting in space for that long, then you don't know Master Chief.

Halo 4 wastes no time in hurling him back into the thick of things. From minute one it's a race for survival, not only for the entire planet, but also for Cortana, Chief's AI companion. A new class of "Tron-from-hell" enemies, the Prometheans, provide not only a new challenge for *Halo* fans, but also a slew of new weapons to play with.

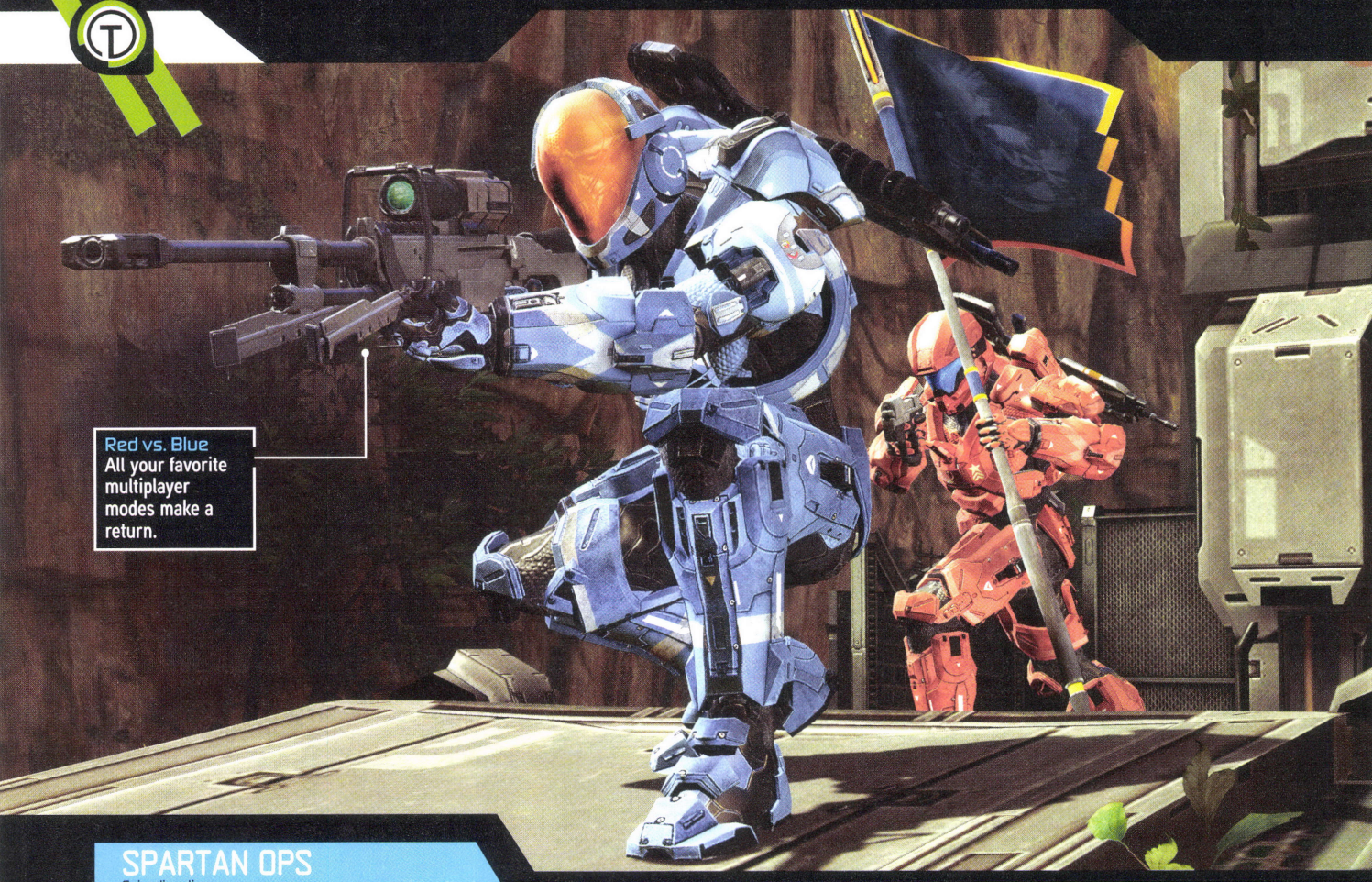
Chief's adventure takes him to several locales, including jungles, space stations, and alien temples. It's hard to describe debris-filled outer space or disintegrating aliens as "beautiful," but 343 Industries substantially raised the bar for visuals, making *Halo 4* the shiniest— and most gruesome—entry in the series.

Throughout the eight or so hours of the campaign, I found myself sucked back into Master Chief's war-torn world. *Halo 4* feels more intense than previous entries: The gun battles are more bombastic, and there are moments where it takes every ounce of courage and every round of ammo to prevail.

I'd like to say that you will enjoy the story even if you've never played a *Halo* game, but *Halo 4* is very much a sequel. Emotional cut-scenes tug at the heart-strings, but only if you already care about these characters, and the plot is grounded in an expanded *Halo* universe. In fact, I had to do a lot of digging to uncover the main villain's backstory and motivations.

Halo 4's Normal difficulty will challenge even veteran players—this may be the hardest *Halo* game to date. If you're down with engaging in intense firefights that you'll barely survive, awesome. But unless you love dying a lot, I recommend grabbing co-op partners if you want to play Heroic or Legendary.

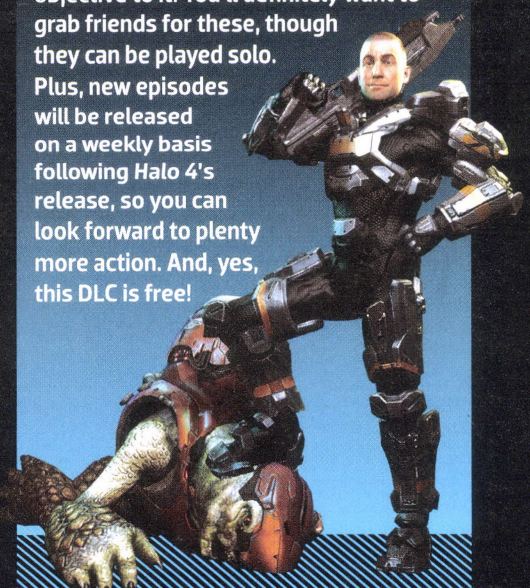
There is so much more to *Halo 4* than just the single-player campaign (be sure to check the next page for more information), and 343 has crammed a ton of multiplayer and episodic content in here, including Spartan Ops, a new post-game mode. *Halo 4* marks a strong return for the series, with a lot of extra goodies to boot. Master Chief is definitely back.



Red vs. Blue
All your favorite multiplayer modes make a return.

SPARTAN OPS
Episodic action

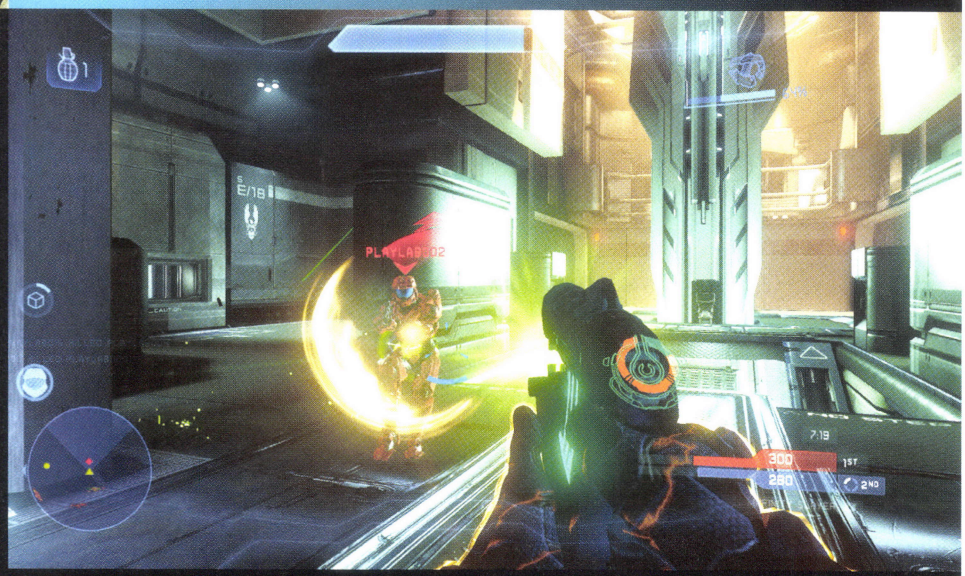
Spartan Ops follows a team of Spartans after the events of the campaign, giving you additional missions, cut-scenes, and story to experience. Designed for co-op play, each of the five missions within an episode is a short, ten-minute burst of very classic-feeling *Halo* design, and each mission has a very different feel and objective to it. You'll definitely want to grab friends for these, though they can be played solo. Plus, new episodes will be released on a weekly basis following *Halo 4*'s release, so you can look forward to plenty more action. And, yes, this DLC is free!



▲ The Mantis mech is one of the awesome new vehicles you can use to blow stuff up.

VEHICLES
Between the Warthog, Covenant vessels, tanks, airships, and jets, there are way more vehicles in Halo 4 than ever before. So many ways to shoot down your enemies!

**MULTIPLAYER ** *Halo*'s multiplayer is arguably the most important feature for fans. The new additions (on top of the already insanely robust modes that return, including Slayer and King of the Hill) add a level of excitement to the game that I haven't felt in years. Changes include customizable weapon load-outs for varying playstyles and a point system that rewards you for more than just killing opponents. It's a much more modern approach to multiplayer, borrowing pages from *Call of Duty*, while still keeping its *Halo*-ness intact.



PROMETHEANS \\

The new enemies and weapons in *Halo 4* jump out as some of the biggest stars of the game. From the agile, deadly Crawlers, to the tough-as-nails Promethean Knights, enemies are brutally smart and difficult to overcome. Upon defeating them, though, Master Chief can take and use their sweet weapons, such as the powerful Light Rifle and Suppressor.

▲ *Halo 4* is awesome to play with friends, thanks to a multitude of multiplayer modes.

GAME DETAILS

MATURE 17+

HALO 4

INFO
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: 343 Studios
Platforms: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
November 6, 2012

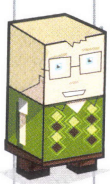
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 16-player online

GENRE
First-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
People who prefer to shoot aliens instead of terrorists

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Stunning visuals, intense action, and Chief has never looked better
- ❤ More game content than any other *Halo*
- ❤ A co-op player's dream come true

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ The real story is hidden in game terminals



RYAN SAYS:
I felt *Halo: Reach* was one of the weaker entries in the sci-fi series, so I'm excited for Master Chief's return.

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: MISTS OF PANDARIA

Unearthing the secrets of Azeroth's newest addition • Words: T.J. Hafer

World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria is a valiant attempt to kung fu-kick some Eastern-themed freshness into an eight-year-old MMO that finds itself combating new engines, new business models, and player fatigue. Adding a new continent, five more levels, and a new class and race to the game (among other things), *Pandaria* is certainly substantial. But the 300-pound panda in the room remains: Is that enough to buoy the value of the genre's last explosively successful subscription game in the face of the free-to-play revolution?

The new zones and quests are among WoW's best, presenting some of the most beautiful and detailed scenery yet. The feeling of standing on the shore of a whole new continent ripe for exploration is hard to top. Of course, you can only ever have that feeling once, but the environments are impressive enough to continue adding to the experience even on repeat visits.

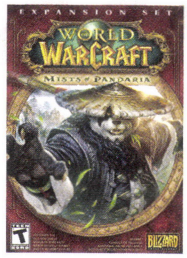
Pandaria offers more things to do at the level cap than any previous expansion. Between a slew of dungeons, two new battlegrounds, and a wider variety of daily quests than ever, there's plenty to keep you occupied at level 90. *Pandaria*'s quality and quantity of end-game content is the highest of any expansion so far, though it all fits within a familiar framework.

For a current subscriber, *Pandaria* is an absolute no-brainer. And if you're a lapsed player looking for a few weeks of new zones and quests to experience, it's definitely worth the price of the box and a game time card. But for those hoping to see the venerable genre juggernaut reinvent itself, or provide an irresistible reason to hop back on the monthly fee train over the numerous free-to-play MMO options on the market, you may find this one's kung fu is just a little too weak.

STAYING CLASSY

The Monk class is one of the freshest-feeling elements of this expansion, and one of the most enjoyable classes in WoW's history. You'll dig making heavy use of the Monk's movement and battlefield control, and will especially enjoy the action-game-esque mechanic that lets you pick up orbs on the battlefield to restore health and ability-fueling Chi. The new animations are also a sight to behold.

GAME DETAILS



WORLD OF WARCRAFT: MISTS OF PANDARIA

INFO
Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Platforms: PC

RELEASE DATE
September 25, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Massively multiplayer

GENRE
MMORPG

SUITABLE FOR
Ancient land explorers, flying kick experts, relapsed addicts

▼ Only in Azeroth will you find an anthropomorphic, armor-wearing cow wielding a machete.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD \\

01 RAIDS FOR EVERYONE
Pandaria brings the welcome addition of a Raid Finder to all tiers of content.

02 HIDDEN KNOWLEDGE
The culture and history of the Pandaren is a rich addition to *Warcraft* lore.

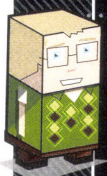
03 TALENT SHOW
The completely redone talent system allows for more build diversity, but is less granular and tweakable.

04 I CHOOSE YOU!
The pet battle system, in the form of a new profession skill, is a humorously self-aware *Pokémon* clone.

DUNGEON CRAWLING \\
WoW's dungeon design gets progressively better with every expansion. The same holds true here. However, veterans of heroic and raid content in previous expansions will find little in the way of truly surprising new concepts, as the boss fights feel like remixes of old ideas. *Pandaria*'s art and story, on the other hand, have a new Eastern theme and are top-notch.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- New continent packed with artistic beauty and lore
- New class with some unique combat mechanics

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Too much of the same routine
- Still charging a monthly fee when comparable quality content is available without



RYAN SAYS:
As a retired raid leader and *WoW* addict, *MoP* might incite my return to late nights fueled by energy drinks.

OVERALL RATING:
4

DISHONORED

There's always a little more innocence left to lose • Words: Ryan Taljonick

Just as the carpenter needs a saw and hammer to mold wood into...stuff, so too does the assassin require the tools necessary for their tasks. And if there's one thing you can count on in *Dishonored*, it's always having the right tools.

There's the spring razor proximity trap that tears enemies into shreds; there's the crossbow that puts enemies to sleep (literally or permanently); there are blades, grenades, guns, and a bevy of magical powers perfect for sneaking past bad guys or outright destroying them. As Corvo, the once-noble protector of Dunwall's Empress who's been betrayed and framed for her murder, you'll use all of these things (or a few of them, depending on how you play) to unravel a grand coup conspiracy and clear your name.

In practice, this first-person action game plays like a cross between *BioShock* and the *Thief* franchise. Its missions are structured around assassinations, but you don't actually have to kill anyone. Instead, you're assigned targets that need to disappear, and can approach them however you choose. For example, you can use magic spells to observe enemies through walls and teleport around unseen, or you can rely on offensive weapons and spells such as the ability to summon flesh-eating plague rats that chew hostiles into pulpy piles.

Unfortunately, you'll only be able to use a fraction of these awesome tools if playing nonlethally because your body count affects the ending of the game. The beautiful thing is, every environment supports your playstyle. Levels are rife with hidden pathways and secret rooms full of cash, ammo, and the Runes needed to purchase or upgrade Corvo's magic powers. There are even creatively satisfying ways to deal with targets that don't rely on mundanely shoving a blade into their stomachs. The sense of freedom here is absolutely wonderful.

The world is rewarding to explore in its own right, too. The steampunk industrial city of Dunwall is an interesting one, and tons of audiologs and text excerpts expand on its rich history and current woes (of which there are many). *Dishonored*'s art style and design provide a unique backdrop to a refreshingly original experience—and whether you're murdering everyone or just choking them out, there's a lot worth seeing in the process.

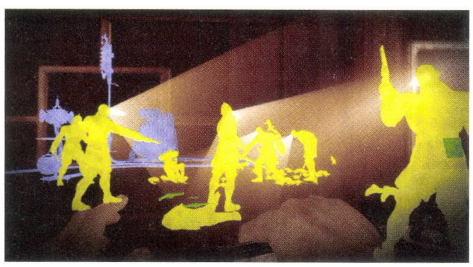
THE PLAGUE \\

While Dunwall was once the crown jewel of the Empire, it's now been all but lost to the plague, a highly contagious sickness spread by flesh-eating hordes of rats. This contagion has turned much of the city's population into corpses. Some have even become Weepers, ravenous zombie-like beings eager to turn citizens into mindless carriers of disease. The plague adds lots of genuinely creepy atmosphere to *Dishonored*'s world, and you'll often have to fend off Weepers yourself. Be cautious—those things are nasty.

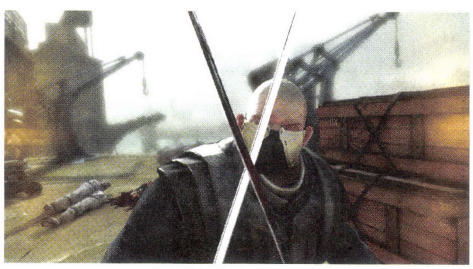
WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD \\

It can't be understated how awesome the world of *Dishonored* really is. The atmosphere of Dunwall is one of the most substantive I've ever experienced in a game. Everything from the city's grandiose buildings to its steampunk automobiles and plague-ridden streets is imbued with a sense of originality that feels truly authentic. The simple act of exploring the city and encountering its wonders is almost as epic as the free-form combat. It's one of those expertly crafted worlds you'll yearn to revisit.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE \\



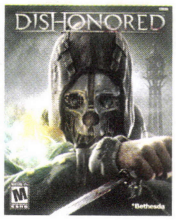
▲ Dark Vision lets you see enemies and their field of vision through walls and objects.



▲ What the...? How the heck did Bane get into the city of Dunwall!?

**TOUGH DECISIONS ** This fight could go one of many ways. You could shoot these two down, freeze time and run, or stagger them with a spell. Or, you could freeze time as one fires his gun, possess the other, and walk him in front of the bullet meant for your face.

GAME DETAILS



MATURE 17+

DISHONORED

INFO
Publisher: Bethesda Softworks
Developer: Arkane Studios
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: PS3

RELEASE DATE
October 9, 2012

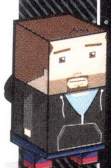
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Sneaky stealthers and anyone who wants to emulate what it's probably like to be a super-rad steampunk assassin

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Unique art style and design
- ❤ A refreshingly original game
- ❤ Awesome spells and weapons

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Only being able to use a few of those spells and weapons in nonlethal playthroughs
- ✖ Underwhelming ending



CHARLIE SAYS:
I've been itching for a game like *Thief* for quite some time. Looks like *Dishonored* could be what I was waiting for.

OVERALL RATING:

4.25

Sectoid
These little guys are the most basic of alien grunts, but they're still deadly.
Soldier
They can evolve into one of four classes: sniper, heavy, assault, or support.

XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN

Addicting hardcore strategy finally comes to consoles • Words: Ryan Taljonick

Perhaps no other game in recent memory is as deserving of the descriptor "cruel mistress" as XCOM: *Enemy Unknown*. It doesn't care about your feelings, or if you've named members of your alien-fighting squad after friends or family. (They'll probably die...permanently.) Entire countries will go into panic when you don't liberate them from alien invasions—because you were busy saving someone else. Things will fall apart. You. Will. Fail. And *maybe*, if you persevere, you'll learn from your mistakes and save humankind from annihilation. Maybe.

Enemy Unknown is a less granular—but still faithfully complex—reimagining of the 1994 strategy game X-COM: *UFO Defense*. It's the kind of game where finishing the campaign is a goal, but not a guarantee. You can play for 10 hours and *still* lose. For new players, it's a challenging but approachable experience. X-COM veterans will find that it streamlines things, such as stats and time units, into more easily digestible concepts, though it'll also quickly reintroduce that old familiar sting of loss and defeat. For any player, however, *Enemy Unknown* is unforgiving in its difficulty—in a refreshingly good way.

As commander of the XCOM project, an organization tasked with defending Earth from aliens, you'll have to tackle an initially overwhelming number of responsibilities. You'll build a base, construct its facilities, research alien technology, develop new equipment for your squad, and embark on alien-slaying ground missions, all while trying to keep the project's funding nations happy.

Juggling these burdens is extremely tough, thanks to always-limited resources. Do you spend money on better guns for your troops? Or do you buy deployable satellites to keep a nation from withdrawing XCOM support? This delicate balance is brilliant in its execution: No matter how far along you are in a campaign, you'll always be met with grueling challenge.

Enemy Unknown forces you to think hard about every decision, because just one misstep can (and often will) spell ruin for your entire campaign. But when things start to click—when you finally overcome the alien threat—the sense of reward is unlike anything you'll likely experience elsewhere. For strategy players both old and new, this is a game that should not be missed.

▼ Playing as aliens in multi-player is a great way to get acquainted with their abilities.

PLAYER VS. PLAYER

The multiplayer in *Enemy Unknown* is a simple but fun distraction from the single-player campaign. Here, two players are given a point limit for building a squad of humans, aliens, or a mix of the two—each unit costs points to use. Once you've built your squad, you'll go toe-to-toe with another human player in the ultimate game of chess.

▲ Geoscape

Scanning Earth's surface for alien activity is the only way to progress your research and construction projects. It also results in finding alien attacks, which you must then put an end to on the ground.

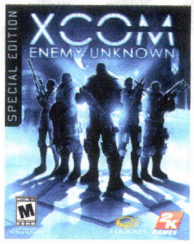
▲ In the field, you're allowed two actions per turn. Make use of cover and remember: Overwatch is your friend!

▲ Sometimes you'll feel cheated when shots miss, despite a chance-to-hit percentage sitting in the 90s.

CONSOLE STRATEGY

Console owners rejoice: *Enemy Unknown* is an accessible strategy game with simple yet intuitive gamepad controls. The console interface is slightly different than the PC version's, but both work fantastically well. Expect a few framerate hiccups and occasional minor bugs or glitches regardless of which version you choose to play.

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS



XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN

INFO
Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Firaxis Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
October 9, 2012

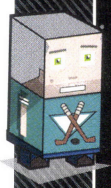
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 2-player online

GENRE
Turn-based strategy

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone looking for a strategy game with substance

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ An immensely complex strategy game that plays great on consoles
- ❤ Incredibly organic gameplay

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Minor bugs and glitches
- ✖ Getting a "game over" after ten or more hours of play
- ✖ The heartbreak that comes with losing a powerful soldier



ANDY SAYS:
Wow...if you have self-esteem issues, you might not be ready for *XCOM*. There's no "lets you down easy" to be found.

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

12
New SUPER MARIO BROS. U
Ninte
RATING PENDING to EVERYONE 10+
RP-E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Visit www.esrb.org for rating information
*Broadband Internet access required for online features. For more info, go to support.nintendo.com
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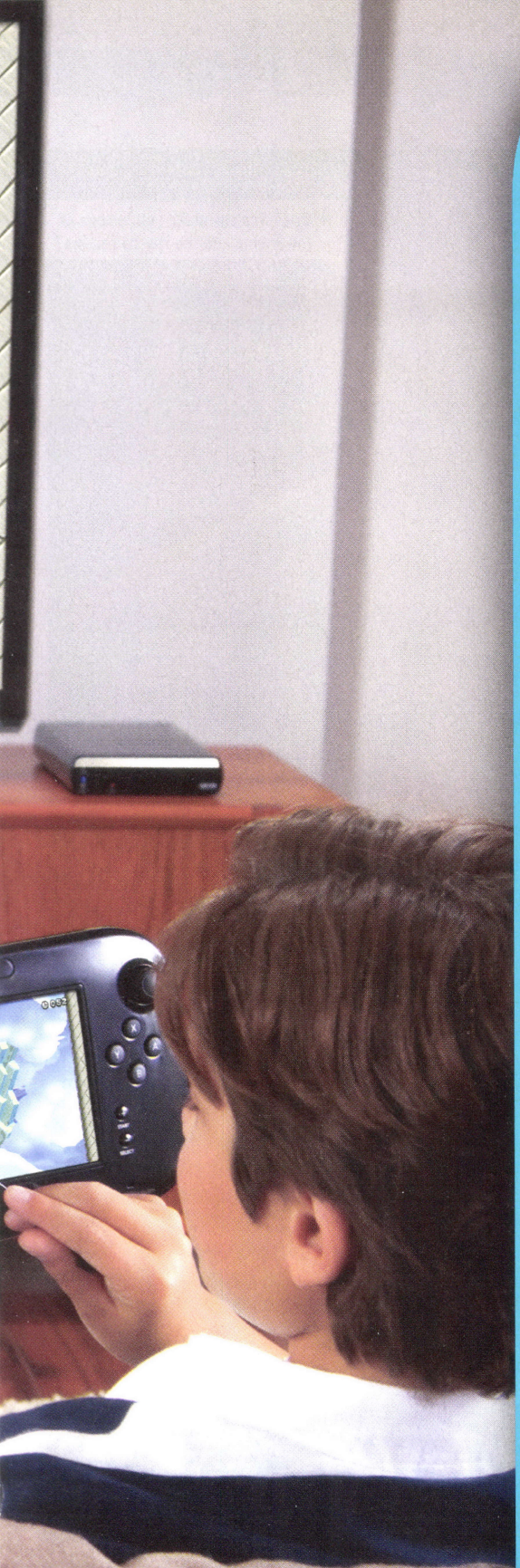

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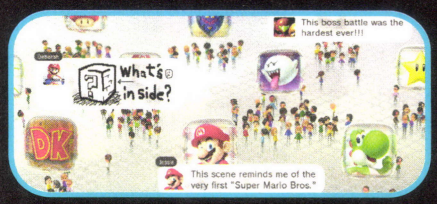

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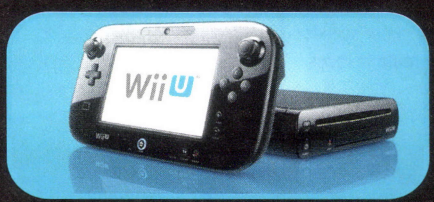

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PS3 XBOX 360 PC PS VITA

EVERYONE 10+
E
10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GAME DETAILS

NEED FOR SPEED MOST WANTED

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Criterion Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC, PS Vita
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
October 30, 2012

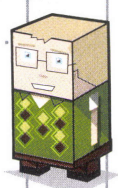
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8-player online
(up to 12-player on PC)

GENRE
Racing

SUITABLE FOR
People who wanna go *fast*

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Cool pre-race vignettes add incentive to finding new races
- ❤ Huge city with tons of challenges
- ❤ Killer sense of speed

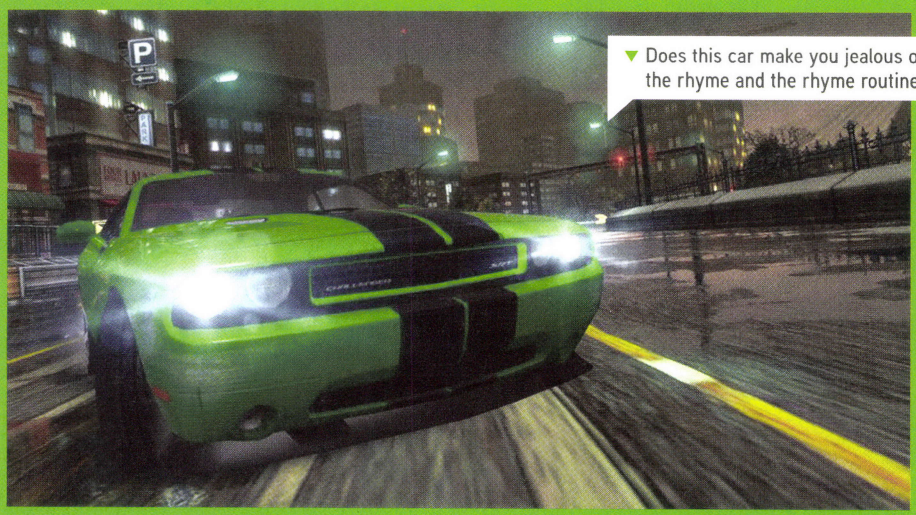
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Friends posting faster speeds
- ✖ Cop chases en route to races get annoying



RYAN SAYS:
If my road rage translates into videogame driving skills, the po-po ain't gonna catch me.

OVERALL RATING:
4.75

GAMER



▼ Does this car make you jealous of the rhyme and the rhyme routine?

NEED FOR SPEED MOST WANTED

Hot fuzz...and the drivers who hate them • Words: Timothy J. Seppala

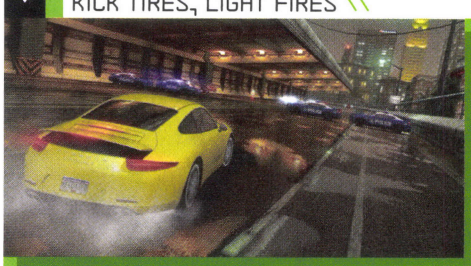
I careened down the oncoming lane thick with rush-hour traffic, a murder of police cruisers in my rearview. Maybe they were chasing me for doing 143 mph in a residential area; maybe it was the multicar pile-up I caused fighting for first place. The license plate of the Corvette squad car I was drafting dominated my field of view, but before I could shunt him out of my way, he jerked left. I couldn't process why...until my Lamborghini met face-to-face with a pick-up.

Need for Speed Most Wanted is rife with awesome moments like this.

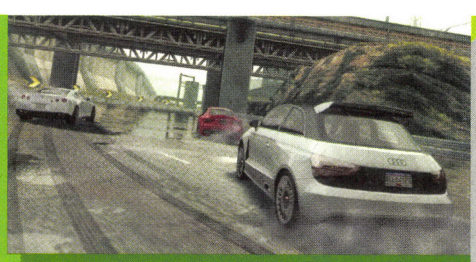
Whether I was screwing around with buddies online or smashing billboards around the city, the fuzz posed an ever-present threat. This had its ups and downs. Picking up a cop chase en-route to each new event was easy, because who really drives like a law-abiding citizen in a game? Pursuits were exciting and added to my overall score, unlocking upgrades and new boss races, but sometimes obstructed actual racing.

Comparisons to developer Criterion's last open-world racer, the near-perfect *Burnout Paradise*, are inevitable. *MW* bests its older brother in a few respects, but falls short in others. Stylish pre-race vignettes can't hide new city Fairhaven's lack of personality, and the use of unwreckable licensed cars sanitizes *Paradise*'s unadulterated violence. But while its grass isn't as green and its girls aren't as pretty, *Most Wanted* still feels like home. ■

▼ KICK TIRES, LIGHT FIRES \\



▲ Reinflating tires and flashing lights on spike strips make cop chases and roadblocks less unfair this time out.



▲ With Kinect, it's possible to change transmission gears or even body modifications by voice midrace. Yup, it's rad.

FORZA HORIZON

Endless summer • Words: Hilary Goldstein

The *Forza Motorsport* series has always had the edge in visuals and car physics, but it's felt a little soulless to me. That changes with the exciting *Forza Horizon*, an open-world action racer that keeps all the great physics while having some fun at the same time.

You've been invited to participate in the Horizon Festival, a seemingly never-ending celebration of cars and music. Set in a fictional (and cop-free) town in Colorado, you can go anywhere at any time, but your main goal is competing in festival events. Doing well in these earns different-colored wristbands that unlock even more races. But there's a lot more to *Horizon* than just your standard set of race events. After all, you have a whole city waiting to be explored.

There's always the danger that an open world will feel empty and act as filler between organized races. *Horizon* avoids any of those pitfalls by adding speed traps to record your fastest times on the open road, the ability to start an impromptu race with any AI competitor you pass on the street, and hidden signs to smash for discounts at the upgrade garage.

Tying the open-road experience to the structured races is a slew of skill challenges. No matter where you're driving, you'll earn points for drifting, dodging traffic, wrecking signs, and more—all while the hardcore physics engine makes the experience realistic. Completing challenges boosts your popularity, opening new race events. There's a lot to do in *Forza Horizon*, and it's a lot of fun doing pretty much all of it.

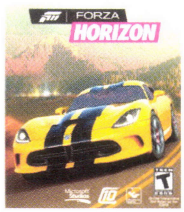
▲ Special showcases have crazy setups, like having you race against a biplane. Winning earns sweet cars.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE \\

There are plenty of options for taking on your friends, either directly in online multiplayer or by challenging their recorded ghosts in single-player races. My personal fave is playing a game of Infection on Horizon's golf course. One car is "it," crashing into others to grow an army of infected racers.

Get Physical
All of the hardcore car physics that make the *Forza* series great are in *Horizon*.

GAME DETAILS



FORZA HORIZON

INFO
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Playground Games/ Turn 10
Platforms: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
October 23, 2012

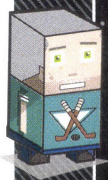
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8-player online

GENRE
Racing

SUITABLE FOR
Those who feel the need for speed and want realistic car physics

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ The sim engine of *Forza* with the soul of an arcade racer
- ❤ Lots to do
- ❤ Absolutely gorgeous

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Co-op missions are weak
- ✖ Has a bit too much 'tude at times



ANDY SAYS:
Cool, *Forza* in an open world. Between *NFS Most Wanted* and *Horizon*, my controller is going to log some serious mileage.

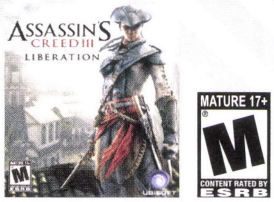
OVERALL RATING:

4.5

www.atgamermagazine.com

PS VITA

GAME DETAILS



ASSASSIN'S CREED III LIBERATION

INFO
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Sofia/ Montreal
Platforms: PS Vita

RELEASE DATE
October 30, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Asynchronous

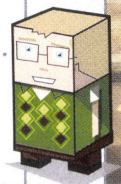
GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Assassin's Creed diehards, Vita adventurers

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Ably translates open-world approach to Vita
- ❤ Aveline is an intriguing new heroine
- ❤ Looks pretty sharp

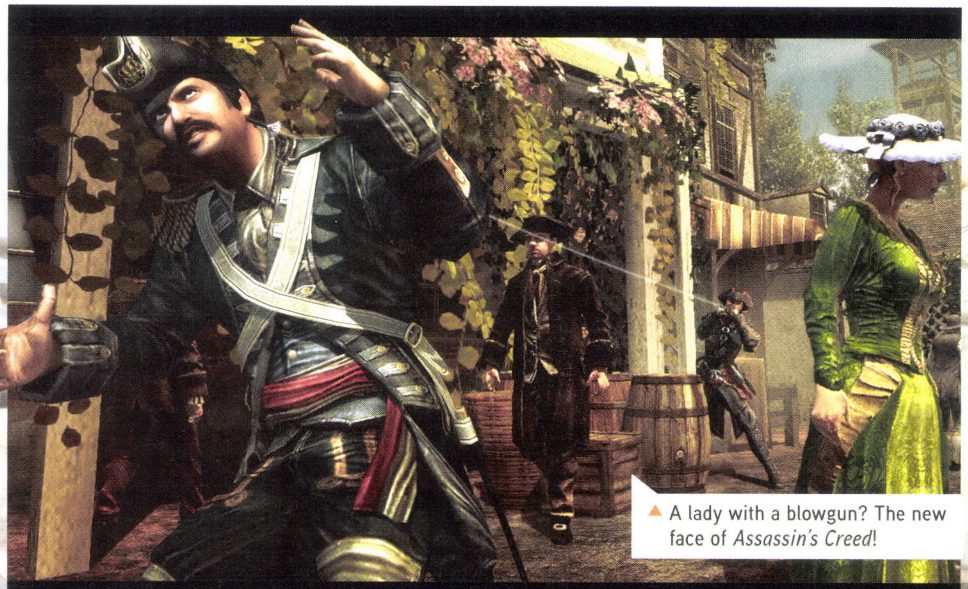
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Lacks big moments and extensive content
- ✖ Some Vita-specific features are gimmicky

RYAN SAYS:
The PSP's *Assassin's Creed* outings were lackluster—is Aveline the Vita's Lady Luck?



OVERALL RATING:

3.5



▲ A lady with a blowgun? The new face of *Assassin's Creed*!

ASSASSIN'S CREED III LIBERATION

Liberated from televisions, but still lethal • Words: Andrew Hayward

Rather than try to downsize the massive *Assassin's Creed III* console experience onto the PlayStation Vita, Ubisoft opted instead to use the powerful portable to tell a smaller side story with *Liberation*. It adds fresh elements to the franchise while affirming that its stealthy adventuring can successfully work on a handheld.

Starring the series' first female lead, Aveline de Grandpré, the open-world adventure takes place in New Orleans in the late 18th century. *Liberation* serves up some unique terrain to explore, including the iconic city itself, the surrounding bayou, and even a jaunt to Mexico. While the story briefly intersects with that of AC3's Connor Kenway, it's primarily a self-contained tale of discovery, as Grandpré seeks answers about her long-absent mother and the motives of the Assassins, all while helping to free slaves.

At its core, *Liberation* is tried-and-true *Assassin's Creed*, letting you freely scale structures with ease and stealthily slay foes, and the root experience really does transfer well to the Vita control scheme. It also looks pretty sharp, aside from the oft-fluctuating framerate and occasional glitches.

While additions such as the blowpipe and whip prove worthwhile, others are less remarkable. Donning different costumes can slow down the action at times, plus some of the hardware-specific features feel like gimmicks. More notably, though, the campaign lacks both the thrills and impact of the series' best adventures, and there's little of interest beyond the main story.

Still, *Liberation* is a largely successful supplement to *Assassin's Creed III*, and one that sets the Vita template for the series. Now, let's see it done with more gusto.

▲ Aveline's whip can be used in combat, as well as to complete lengthy jumps in certain scenarios.

LIBERATE? DOMINATE!

Liberation's online mode is an asynchronous, turn-based game of domination (like *Risk*) that pits the Assassins against Abstergo in week-long, worldwide battles for area control. Sadly, I didn't get a chance to test this mode by press time, but my impressions will be included in the next issue.

FABLE: THE JOURNEY

Arm-flailing through Albion • Words: Matt Cabral

Kinect games created for the "hardcore" crowd have not fared especially well. *Fable: The Journey*—a Kinect-enabled chapter in the popular fantasy franchise—succeeds where the likes of *Steel Battalion* and *Blackwater* have failed, however. Combining solid motion-controlled gameplay with rich storytelling, colorful characters, and a picturesque fairy-tale setting, *The Journey* is not just a good Kinect game—it's a good game, period.

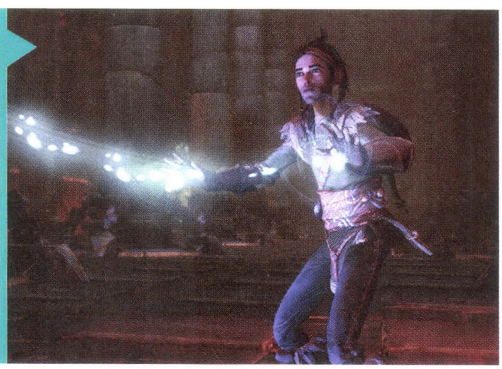
Unfolding from a first-person perspective and controlled with arm gestures, this latest trek through Albion is a far cry from anything *Fable* fans have previously experienced. Thankfully, the Kinect mechanics—controlled from a seated position—make it more immersive than gimmicky. Sure, they're not as precise as traditional gamepad inputs, but annoyances are washed away by the joy that comes when everything clicks; whether outrunning a world-consuming creature from behind the reins of your horse-drawn carriage or clearing a village of angry Hobbes with spells spit from your fingertips, the fun easily outweighs minor frustrations.

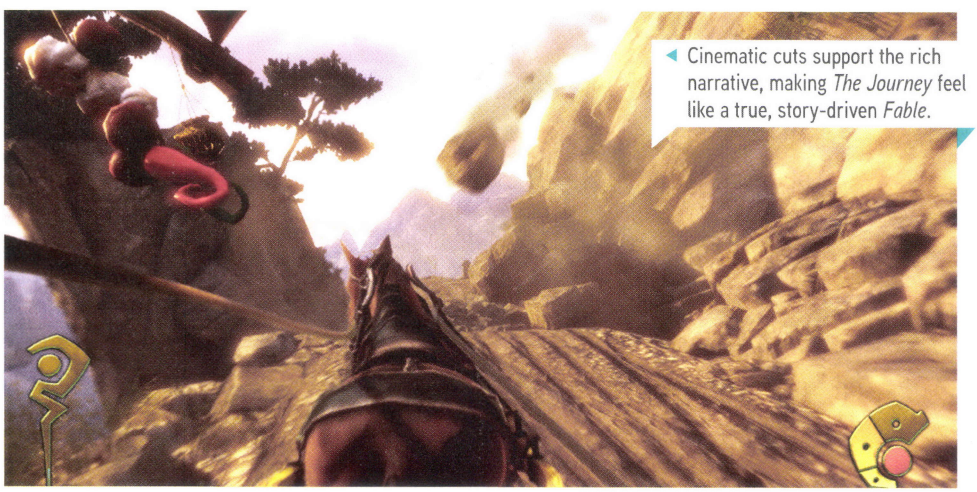
While it's more focused on action-packed combat than role-playing, collected orbs allow you to upgrade powers and abilities. Much of the franchise's exploration-encouraging gameplay is replaced with a more scripted, often on-rails experience, but *The Journey* does a fantastic job immersing you in a full-on *Fable* adventure; branching paths, optional areas, and a detail-drenched world brimming with the series' signature charm are largely to thank. Whether you're a *Fable* fan or Kinect owner tired of mini-games, this is a journey well worth taking.

▲ Surprisingly nuanced Kinect controls let you steer Seren and control his speed.

MAN'S NEW BEST FRIEND \\

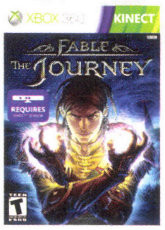
Much of *Fable: The Journey* takes place from behind the reins of your faithful steed, Seren. Whether hoofing it from monsters or into rainstorms, the game's most pulse-pounding moments find you and your four-legged friend relying on each other. The bond is further strengthened at camps, where you can feed and heal Seren.





◀ Cinematic cuts support the rich narrative, making *The Journey* feel like a true, story-driven *Fable*.

GAME DETAILS



TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

FABLE: THE JOURNEY

INFO
Publisher: Microsoft Studios
Developer: Lionhead Studios
Platforms: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
October 9, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Fable fans and Kinect owners craving a hardcore game

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ The visuals are on par with previous *Fable* games
- ❤ Intuitive Kinect controls
- ❤ Full of signature *Fable* flavor and style

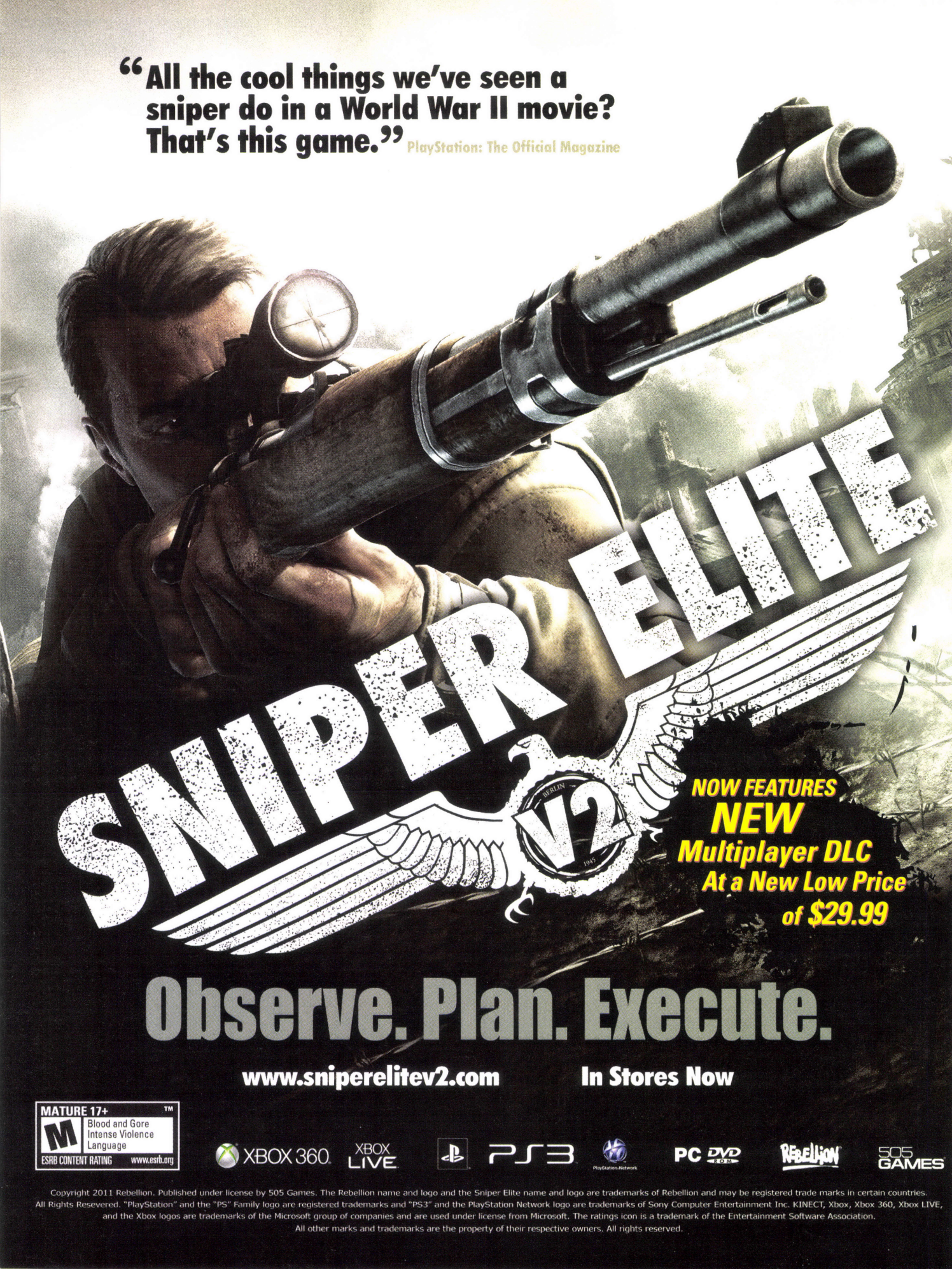
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Occasional annoyances with the Kinect's lack of precision

ANDY SAYS:
Call me lazy, but I like the idea of being able to play a Kinect game sitting down, especially for an adventure like this.

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

@@@@@



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POKÉMON

BLACK VERSION/WHITE VERSION 2

Double your Pokémon-capturing fun...again • Words: Nathan Meunier

Sticking with a rock-solid formula has always been the *Pokémon* franchise's modus operandi, and *Black* and *White 2* doesn't veer too far off the well-trodden path carved out by its predecessors. The repetitive groove of capturing Pokémon in the wild, tussling with gym trainers, and thwarting hair-brained plots hatched by evildoers-lite feels all too familiar, but it's still a fun pursuit that's been spruced up by a few subtle tweaks to the well-worn classic recipe.

Returning to Unova two years later to continue the storyline set in motion in the last game is the one major change *Black* and *White 2* brings to the series. Thankfully, the winding trek isn't a total re-tread of previous ground. While you explore some of the same terrain and face off against old and new foes alike, the Southwest and Northeast sections of the region hold plenty of fresh locations to explore. Challenging trainers from previous games in The Pokémon World Tournament and creating goofy movies at Pokéstar Studios are among the more amusing new diversions to occupy your time beyond the main storyline.

With lots of Pokémon to capture, including an expanded array of the cute combat-ready critters, Habitat Mode also makes it a lot easier for hardcore hunters to figure out where to find certain species. The monster-battling journey is satisfying, if not exactly unpredictable. *Black* and *White 2* plays it a little safe in keeping to the familiar, but that isn't such a big deal when the core foundation is still pretty awesome. All of the small additions add up to make this two-pronged Poké-fest yet another absorbing adventure.

JOIN US

Lending a helping hand to the owner of the oddly named Join Avenue lets you expand the building's shop and item offerings as you connect to people you've battled, traded with, or tagged. Aside from encouraging you to make friends, it opens up rare goodies to buy.

ROXIE

Roxie's rocking stage show faceoff is one of the more amusing gym trainer battles.

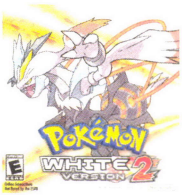
▲ Meet other trainers received over Wi-Fi and challenge them in the Pokémon World Tournament.

▲ Making silly films in the Pokéstar Studios is one of several new pursuits to fiddle with along the way.

A FUN PURSUIT THAT'S SPRUCED UP BY A FEW SUBTLE TWEAKS

DS

GAME DETAILS



EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

POKÉMON BLACK VERSION/ WHITE VERSION 2

INFO
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Game Freak
Platforms: DS

RELEASE DATE
October 7, 2012

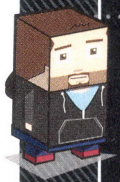
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-5-player wireless multicard play

GENRE
RPG

SUITABLE FOR
Creature-catching addicts and obsessive collectors

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Addictive catching and collecting
- ❤ Overarching story continues
- ❤ A few cool diversions alongside the main campaign

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Pokémon sounds are still awful digitized squawks
- ✖ Formula is getting stale



CHARLIE SAYS:
It may not overhaul the series with new features, but when the basic game mechanic ain't broke, why fix it?

OVERALL RATING:

4

Gamer

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii U
Wii PC DS

GAME DETAILS

SKYLANDERS GIANTS

INFO
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Toys for Bob
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii U, Wii, PC, DS
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
October 21, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 2-player competitive

GENRE
Action-RPG

SUITABLE FOR
Skylanders fans looking for a new excuse to expand their figure collection

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Vastly improved visuals over the original game
- ❤ Original *Skylanders* figures carry over to the new adventure

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ A bigger game—and new figures to buy—means a much lighter wallet

RYAN SAYS:
I may not have played the original *Skylanders*, but man—these toys are awesome.

OVERALL RATING:
3.75

SKYLANDERS GIANTS

Activision's videogame/toy phenomenon gets an upsized sequel

• Words: David Chapman

With the original *Skylanders*, Activision pulled off the best blend of products since someone accidentally stuck chocolate in someone else's peanut butter. Now it's time to clear some space on the old bookshelf once again, as the *Skylanders* collectable line expands with new characters, new toys, and a new game: *Skylanders Giants*.

Crash landing in a far-off corner of Skylands, the evil portal master Kaos accidentally revives a sentinel from a robotic race of conquerors known as Arkeyans. With the Arkeyan robot in tow, Kaos sets out to recover an ancient artifact with the power to rule all of Skylands. As another portal master yourself, it's your job to lead your army of Skylanders—along with the newly awakened Giants—to stop Kaos and save the world once again.

The visuals have received a major overhaul and look vastly better than those in the last game. Gameplay still includes a basic amount of strategy, with certain Skylanders opening up whole new sections to explore. Of course, you'll still need at least one figure of each type to open up the world completely.

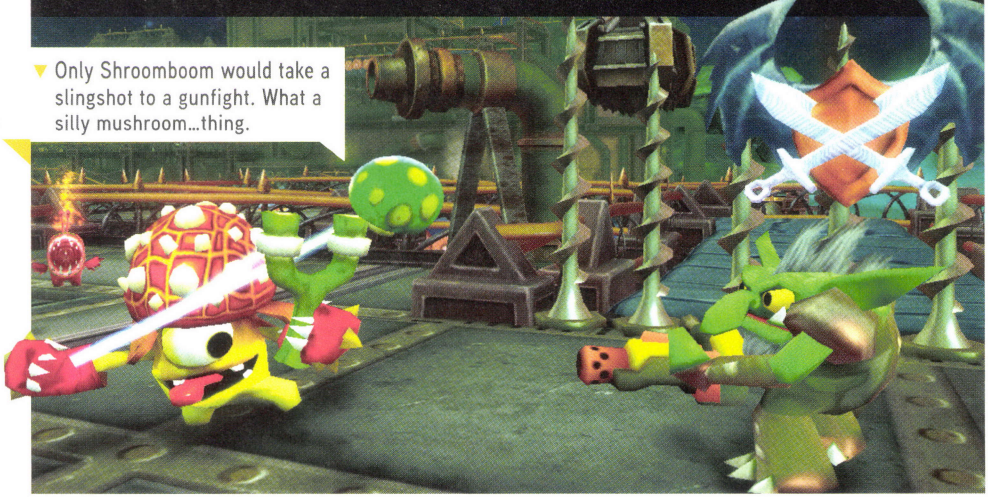
With bigger figures, bigger worlds, and better visuals, *Skylanders Giants* improves on the original in every way. It's also one of those games that'll give you back as much as you're willing to put into it. For the majority of players, the struggle will be in finding the right balance to get the most out of the game without breaking the bank.

BACK IN ACTION

Returning Portal Masters will be happy to know that all their favorite figures from the original *Skylanders* can be used with *Skylanders: Giants*. Series 1 figures are forward compatible, with levels, abilities, and any customizations intact. Plus, all characters' level caps have been increased from 10 to 15.

▲ Eight Giants and eight new Skylanders join returning characters (with new figures).

▲ Giants like Swarm can be swapped in, and will fight just as easily as smaller Skylanders.

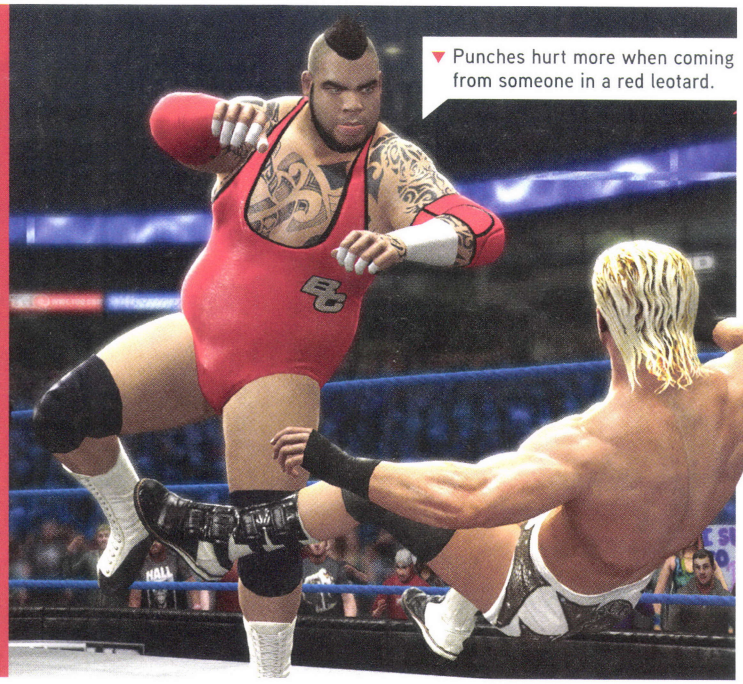


▼ Only Shroomboom would take a slingshot to a gunfight. What a silly mushroom...thing.

WWE '13

THQ's latest grappler has attitude in more ways than one

• Words: Alex Rubens



▼ Punches hurt more when coming from someone in a red leotard.

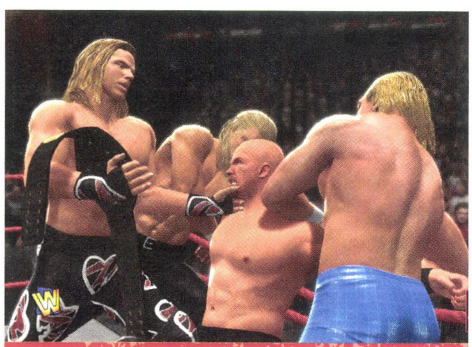
The Attitude Era was perhaps the most pivotal period in WWE history. It changed the rules and allowed Stone Cold Steve Austin, The Rock, and many others to lead a revolution in the sometimes marginalized sport. *WWE '13* allows you to relive this exciting time through dozens of historical matches accompanied by 20 classic WWE videos that set the stage for the action.

Reliving the Attitude Era lays the groundwork for an epic single-player storyline that walks you through the most spectacular moments in WWE history. It also has the side benefit of breaking up the flow of play, so that the campaign doesn't merely become a series of endless fights.

WWE '13 takes the action up a notch from past releases, refining basic gameplay to be less random and more precise. One big improvement is in the control scheme, which now requires more planning for signature moves and finishers rather than just mashing the buttons and hoping you'll connect.

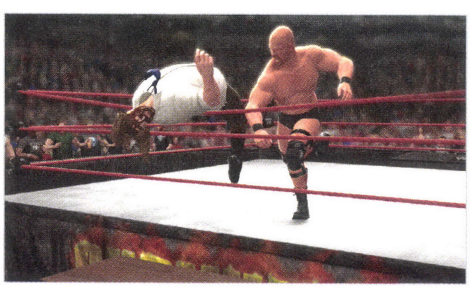
WWE '13's animations are improved over prior installments, too, with reversals and big air moves being much more responsive, especially with the heavyweights. Compared to previous releases, the crowd audio is much more reactive to the action that's happening in the ring, giving authenticity to bouts held in big venues. Big throws or slams with the heavyweight characters can occasionally result in a ring collapse, where the ring physically buckles under the weight of the combatants, with a ripple effect that looks extremely cool.

WWE '13 might not be exceedingly revolutionary, but with the addition of the Attitude Era content, the small improvements in the gameplay, and the overall feel of the environment, it sure is an exciting way to relive the best moments in wrestling history.



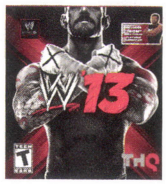
FANTASY MATCH-UPS

The inclusion of the Attitude Era fighters mean that there's a special version of The Rock and John Cena, in addition to their current characters. We can finally see CM Punk take on Stone Cold in all his glory.



▲ Stone Cold Steve Austin doesn't mess around in the ring, especially against Mankind.

GAME DETAILS



WWE '13

INFO
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Yuke's
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
October 30, 2012

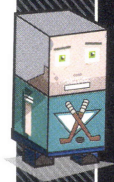
MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 6-player online

GENRE
Wrestling

SUITABLE FOR
WWE followers, past and present

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Return of Attitude Era fighters
- ❤ Reactive crowd audio
- ❤ No more button mashing

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ It's easy to abuse an opponent's animation cycle for damage



ANDY SAYS:
Every year, THQ and Yuke's find a few things they can tweak to improve the gameplay. Mission accomplished again!

OVERALL RATING:

4

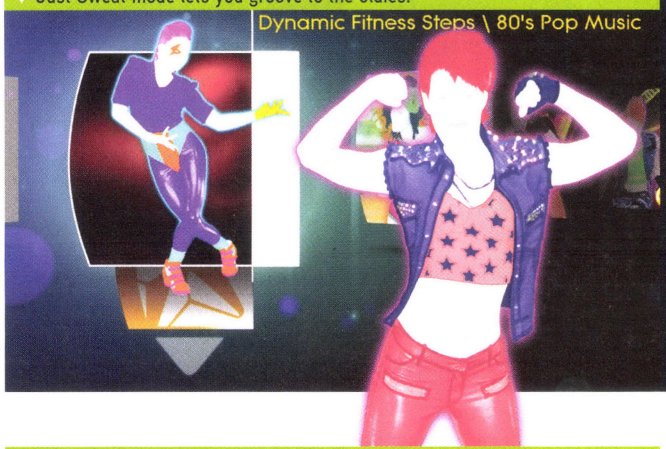
Mini-Reviews:

CHECK THESE SHORTIES!

Of course, size doesn't matter. These games are more than worth your attention.

▼ Dance back in time with "Jailhouse Rock."

▼ Just Sweat mode lets you groove to the oldies.



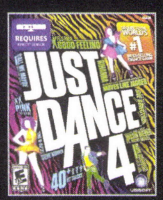
JUST DANCE 4

EVERYONE 10+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft • Platforms: PlayStation Move, Xbox 360 Kinect, Wii • Words: Cheryll Del Rosario

It's Friday night and the thought of leaving the comfort of your home fills you with dread, but the itch to show off your moves to the latest Top 40 jams is overwhelming. However, you refuse to move your feet to show off your skills. What's a girl to do?

Thankfully for us lazy folks, the *Just Dance* games aren't known for requiring particularly high amounts of effort. Even though it's now playable via Kinect and Move, *Just Dance 4* maintains the trappings of a Wii game (the choreographers you follow have one brightly colored hand where they assume you're holding a Wii Remote), so you can easily one-arm your way to success in any of *Just Dance 4*'s routines, regardless of difficulty. Easy to a fault, with a user interface that can be hilarious at best and maddening at its worst, your lazy Friday night just got slightly less so with this fourth installment.

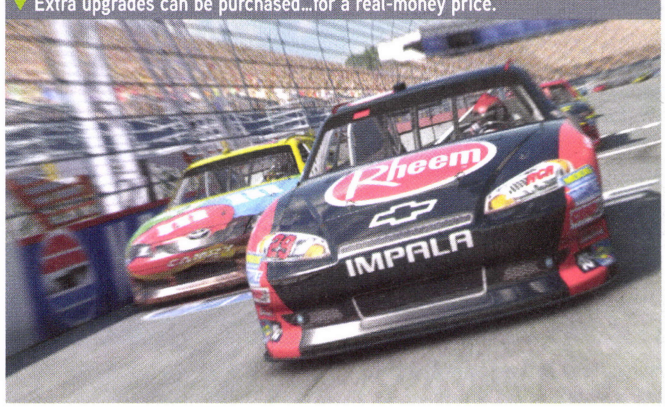


MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player local
GENRE Dance/rhythm
RELEASE DATE
October 9, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Your favorite aunt and her best friends

OVERALL RATING:
3.25

▼ Even the corporate sponsors are authentic!

▼ Extra upgrades can be purchased...for a real-money price.



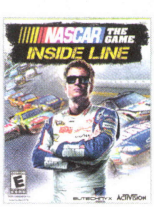
NASCAR THE GAME: INSIDE LINE

EVERYONE CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Eutechnyx • Platform: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii • Words: Michael Grimm

A sequel to NASCAR *The Game 2011*, *Inside Line* is slicker, but does little to improve crossover appeal. Almost every aspect is adjustable, though finding the sweet spot between assists, driver difficulty, and race length requires tweaking. A short race option is helpful for beginners, but it masks the strategies that make NASCAR unique.

Purchasable vehicle upgrades and tuning packages improve your car's performance during the season, adding a sense of progression to an otherwise straightforward career mode. Highlight Challenges are fun and recreate actual moments from the season, though you'll have to pay extra to unlock future additions. *Inside Line* can be fun, but suffers from limited content, muted intensity, and the limited appeal of a serious racing simulation uninterested in courting rookies.



MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player split, 16-player online
GENRE Simulation Racing
RELEASE DATE
November 6, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Hypnotic 100-lap bouts of unerring precision

OVERALL RATING:
3

THE TESTAMENT OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Publisher: Atlus • Developer: Frogwares •
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC • Words: Chuck Osborn

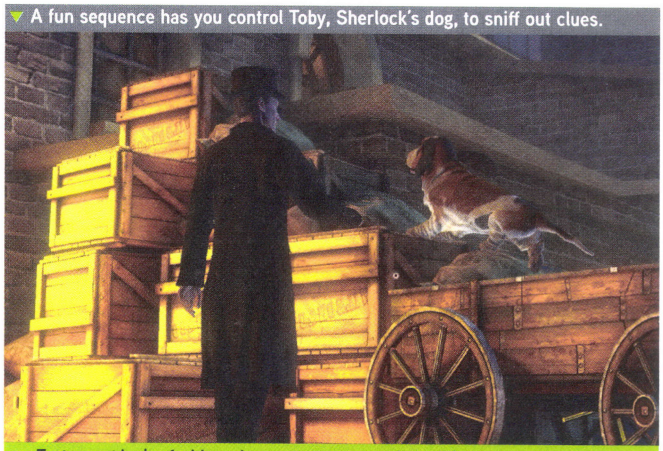
The game is afoot in *The Testament of Sherlock Holmes*, the latest and most ambitious chapter in Frogwares' series of adventures based on the literary detective. That is, as long as you're willing to play through most of it to get to the really good stuff.

Controlling both Sherlock and his companion Dr. Watson (but mostly Sherlock) in this quest to prove Holmes' innocence in a jewel theft, you'll scour open-world environments for clues, solve elaborate puzzles, test materials for their chemical properties, and make deductions based on evidence. The lengthy plot gets better and more labyrinthine as the story progresses, but the early parts of the game drag. While the puzzles are challenging, *Testament* doesn't always convey the rules to solving them, forcing you to find a walkthrough just to find out how to proceed.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only
GENRE Adventure
RELEASE DATE
September 25, 2012
SUITABLE FOR
Hardcore adventure gamers

OVERALL RATING:

3.25



▼ A fun sequence has you control Toby, Sherlock's dog, to sniff out clues.

▼ *Testament* isn't afraid to show some gore...or lots of it.

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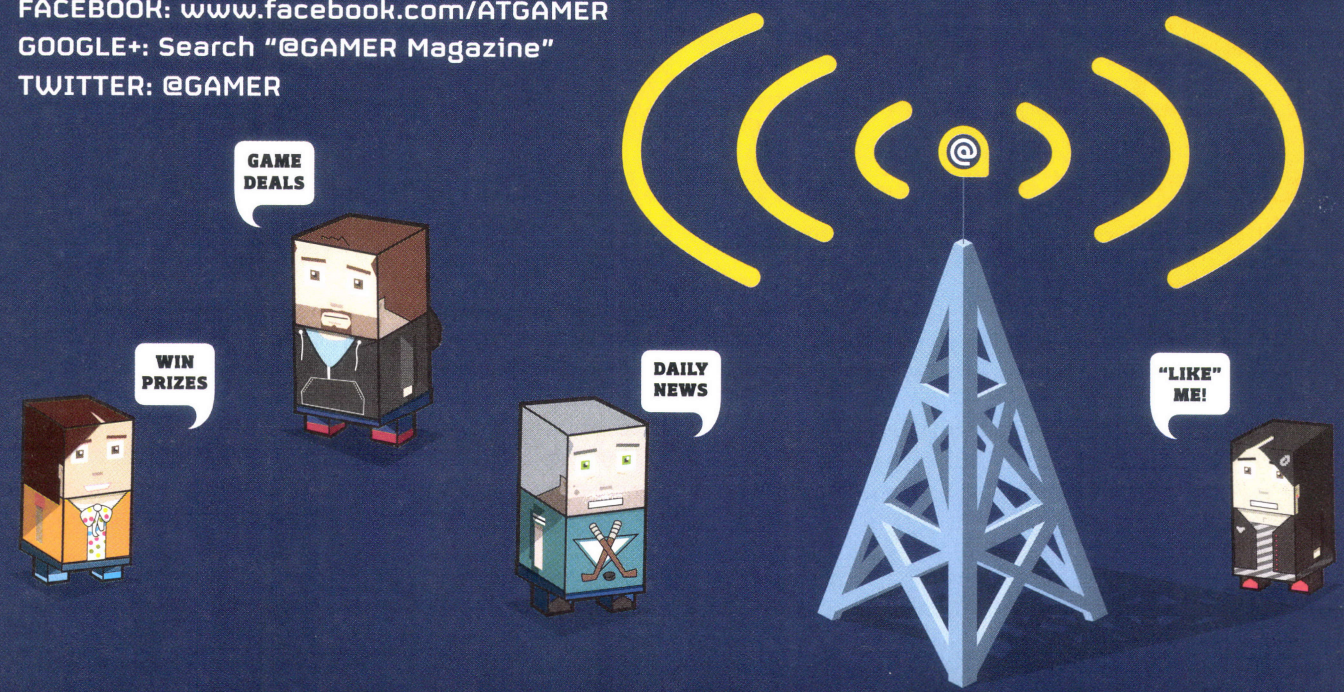
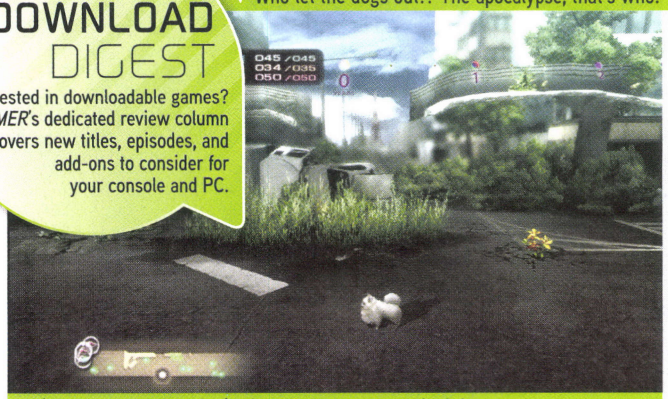


Words: Ryan Scott

DOWNLOAD DIGEST

Interested in downloadable games? *@GAMER*'s dedicated review column covers new titles, episodes, and add-ons to consider for your console and PC.

Who let the dogs out!? The apocalypse, that's who.



I'm pretty sure that dog's about to have a pretty bad day.

TOKYO JUNGLE

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment • Developer: PlayStation C.A.M.P./Crispy's/SCE Japan Studio • Price: $15 • Platforms: PSN (September 25, 2012)

In an era where courtroom adventure games and strange sagas of alien kids rolling up entire worlds into giant trash balls (*Ace Attorney* and *Katamari Damacy*, respectively) find their ways to Western shores, anything's possible...even a tale of post-apocalyptic Tokyo, overrun by feral wildlife after a mysterious extinction-level event.

Tokyo Jungle deserves points for its unique concept, but it's repetitive. Survival mode starts you out as a scrappy Pomeranian, and lays out the basic pattern of progression: Stalk unsuspecting prey from tall grass, snack on kills to maintain your health, evade higher-food-chain predators, mark your territory to establish dominance, and breed with a willing mate to enter a new generation, where you repeat the process with your progeny. Score enough points and you unlock another species with which to re-explore the process.

The action generally vacillates between predator and (much more fragile) prey species, though mechanics don't change much. Unlockable side-stories flesh out specific species, but it's mostly just a journey of persistent, multigenerational survival. It's fun for a while, and it's worth a look just for its weird premise.

OVERALL RATING: 3.5

This could not be anymore '80s. Check out those sweet mullets!

DOUBLE DRAGON NEON

Publisher: Majesco Entertainment • Developer: WayForward Technologies • Price: $10 • Platforms: PSN (September 11, 2012), XBLA (September 12, 2012)

Double Dragon Neon remixes and reboots the consummate '80s arcade beat-em-up, bringing nostalgia out in full force and giving it a twist. The button-mashing action takes twin brawlers Billy and Jimmy Lee from the neon-infused, mean streets (complete with whip-toting gangsta girls and exploitable conveyor belts) to the far reaches of space. Thanks to its flexible upgrade system and a semi-adversarial co-op mode, *Neon* is a reasonably fun homage to a dusty arcade relic.

OVERALL RATING: 3.25

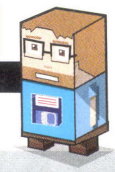
Do none of these bad guys ever consider just throwing a bucket of water at him?

R.A.W.: REALMS OF ANCIENT WAR

Publisher: Focus Home Interactive • Developer: Wizarbox • Price: $15 • Platforms: PSN (September 25, 2012), XBLA (September 19, 2012)

Decent, but ultimately forgettable in the post-*Diablo III* action-RPG landscape, R.A.W. is a pretty standard fantasy hack-n-slash adventure that casts you in your choice of the familiar warrior, wizard, or rogue archetypes, and sends you on your merry way to mow down scores of foes and scoop up sweet loot by the armfuls. A relatively straightforward talent tree gives you some character-building flexibility, but everything else about R.A.W. screams "pretty average." Worth a look if you're feeling let down by Blizzard's latest, but that's crazy talk anyway.

OVERALL RATING: 3.0



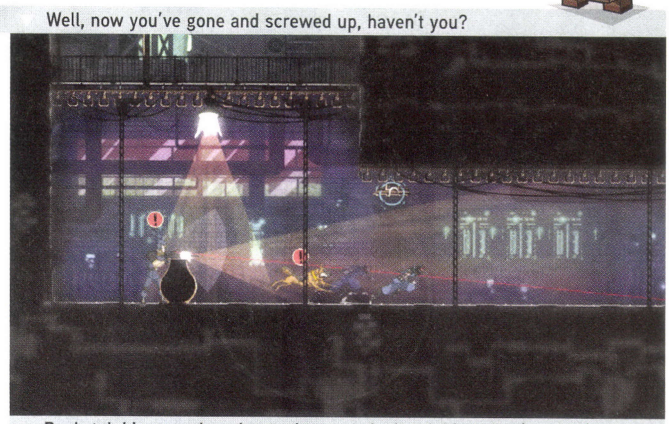
MARK OF THE NINJA

Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: Klei Entertainment • Price: $15 • Platforms: XBLA (September 7, 2012)

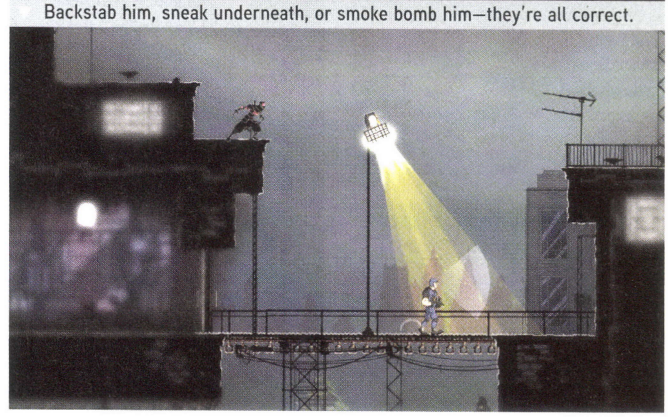
As smart and elegant as stealth action games get, Klei Entertainment's *Mark of the Ninja* dispenses with the finicky and often-frustrating trappings of the average *Metal Gear* or *Splinter Cell* sequel, without sacrificing any of the subgenre's signature elements. It's the sort of game that embraces and encourages meaningful choices: Whether you prefer to creep up behind every last unsuspecting guard and deliver them to their silent, violent deaths, or take the sneaking to its logical extreme and deftly evade any bloodshed or detection, the scoring system awards your successes handsomely.

Key takeaway: Your decisions carry weight, and you never receive arbitrary punishment for playing the "wrong" way. Mark of the Ninja rewards patience, of course; it feels unbelievably awesome when you drop at just the right time to move past a passing guard and a proximity-triggered laser alarm, or when you combine light-dousing darts with point-blank smoke bombs to score an otherwise-impossible sneak-by. On the other hand, direct combat neuters you—get caught flatfooted, and your last checkpoint is just a couple of bullets away. That's the life of a ninja: powerful in the shadows, and weak in broad daylight. Few other games get that so sublimely right.

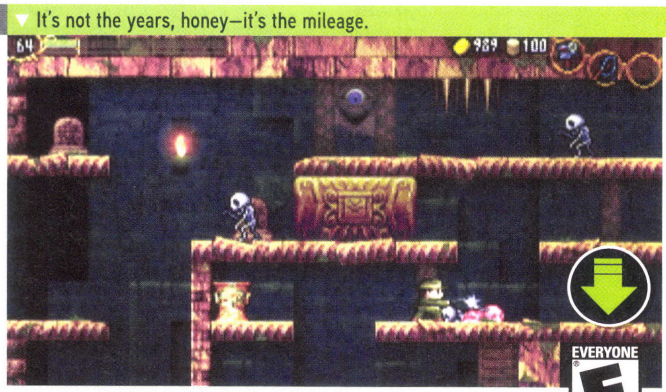
OVERALL RATING: 5.0



Well, now you've gone and screwed up, haven't you?



Backstab him, sneak underneath, or smoke bomb him—they're all correct.



It's not the years, honey—it's the mileage.

LA-MULANA

Publisher: EnjoyUp Games • Developer: Nigoro • Price: $10 • Platforms: WiiWare (September 20, 2012)

La-Mulana tips its hat to everything awesome. It casts you as a whip-toting Indiana Jones expy, who sets off to explore a sprawling *Metroid*-esque ruin—the kind that slowly opens up as you gather more obstacle-navigation power-ups. And it pays tribute to tough-as-nails NES-era games, forcing you to conserve health and resources as you move through perilous territory. Once you're running on fumes, recall to the game's single (and very remote) save point and prep for the next run. It's a killer retro game for the now.

OVERALL RATING: 4.25

It's quaint in that *Hackers* kinda way.

JET SET RADIO

Publisher: Sega • Developer: Smilebit • Price: $10 • Platforms: PSN (September 18, 2012), XBLA (September 19, 2012), PC (September 19, 2012)

Back in its Dreamcast heyday, *Jet Set Radio* was one of the first games to beat the cel-shaded graphics drum, and its quirky, counterculture ideology—it's a game about a gang of hip, rollerbladin' graffiti artists, after all—captured the hearts of gamers everywhere. While the funky soundtrack holds up, and the saccharine art style benefits from this nice HD facelift, the camera is still fairly fussy, and the whole concept just feels a little dated here in 2012. *JSR* is worth the price for the nostalgia trip, but that's about it.

OVERALL RATING: 3.0

A-Z OF @GAMER RATINGS

GAME/PRODUCT	ISSUE #	SCORE OUT OF 5
A		
Adidas miCoach	22	3.0
The Amazing Spider-Man	22	3.25
Angry Birds Trilogy	23	2.75
Armored Core V	18	4.5
Assassin's Creed III	24	4.5
Assassin's Creed III Liberation	24	3.5
Asura's Wrath	18	3.25
B		
Battleship (3DS)	20	2.5
Binary Domain	18	3.5
Birds of Steel	20	4.0
The Black Eyed Peas Experience	16	3.5
Brave: The Video Game	21	3.0
Blades of Time	19	3.0
Borderlands 2	23	4.75
C		
Capcom Digital Collection	18	3.0
Carnival Island	16	3.0
Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion XL	16	2.5
Crush3D	17	4.0
D		
Damage Inc. Pacific Squadron WWII	22	4.5
Dance Central 3	23	4.5
The Darkness II	17	4.0
Darksiders II	22	4.25
Dead or Alive 5	23	3.25
Devil May Cry HD Collection	19	2.75
Diablo III	21	4.25
Dirt Showdown	20	4.0
Dishonored	24	4.25
Dragon's Dogma	20	4.0
E		
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	16	5.0
F		
F1 2012	23	3.5
Fable: The Journey	24	4.5
FIFA Soccer 13	23	4.75
FIFA Street	17	3.75
Final Fantasy XIII-2	17	4.25
Forza Horizon	24	4.5
G		
Game of Thrones	20	3.0
Grand Slam Tennis 2	17	4.0
Gravity Rush	21	4.25
Guild Wars 2	23	4.5
H		
Halo 4	24	4.5
Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary	16	4.0
Heroes of Ruin	21	3.25
Horses 3D	20	3.75
I		
Inversion	20	3.25
J		
Jagged Alliance: Back in Action	18	3.0
Just Dance 4	24	3.25
K		
Karaoke Revolution Glee: Volume 3	16	4.5
Kid Icarus: Uprising	19	3.25
Kinect Disneyland Adventures	16	4.5
Kinect Rush	19	4.0
Kinect Star Wars	19	3.75
Kingdom Hearts 3D [Dream Drop Distance]	21	3.5
Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning	17	4.75
Kirby's Return to Dream Land	16	3.25
L		
The Last Story	22	4.0
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	21	4.0
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	16	4.25
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7 (Vita)	19	2.5
LittleBigPlanet PS Vita	23	4.0
Lollipop Chainsaw	21	3.0
London 2012—Official Video Game of the Olympic Games	21	2.75
M		
Madden NFL 13	22	4.25
Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games (3DS)	18	3.25
Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games (Wii)	18	2.75
Mario Kart 7	16	4.0
Mario Party 9	18	4.0
Mario Tennis Open	21	3.5
Mass Effect 3	18	5.0
Max Payne 3	20	4.0
Medieval Moves: Deadmund's Quest	16	3.25
Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D	17	4.5
MLB 12 The Show	18	4.5
MLB 2K12	17	3.5
Mortal Kombat (Vita)	19	4.25
N		
NASCAR The Game: Inside Line	24	3.0
Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations	18	3.5
NBA 2K13	23	4.25
NCAA Football 13	21	4.0
Need for Speed Most Wanted	24	4.75
Need For Speed The Run	16	3.5
NeverDead	18	2.5
New Super Mario Bros. 2	22	4.0
NHL 13	23	4.0
Ninja Gaiden 3	18	3.0
P		
Persona 4 Arena	22	4.0
Pokémon Black/White 2	24	4.0
Pokémon Conquest	21	4.5
PokéPark 2: Wonders Beyond	18	3.0
Pro Evolution Soccer 2013	23	3.75
Prototype 2	18	4.5
R		
Resident Evil 6	23	4.0
Resident Evil: Revelations	17	4.0
Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City	19	2.75
Resistance: Burning Skies	21	3.0
Ridge Racer Unbounded	19	3.25
Risen 2: Dark Waters (PC)	19	3.75
Rhythm Heaven Fever	18	4.5
Rhythm Thief & the Emperor's Treasure	22	4.0
S		
The Secret World	22	3.75
Serious Sam 3: BFE	16	4.25
Silent Hill Downpour	18	3.5
Silent Hill HD Collection	17	2.75
The Sims 3: Showtime	18	3.5
The Sims 3: Supernatural	23	4.0
Skylanders Giants	24	3.75
Sleeping Dogs	22	4.0
Sniper Elite V2	19	3.0
Sorcery	20	4.0
Soulcalibur V	17	4.0
Spec Ops: The Line	21	4.0
Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir	19	3.0
SSX	17	4.0
Starhawk	20	4.5
Star Wars: The Old Republic	17	4.5
Steel Battalion Heavy Armor	21	4.0
Street Fighter X Tekken	18	4.0
Super Mario 3D Land	16	4.5
Syndicate	17	4.0
T		
Tales of Graces f	17	4.0
Tekken 3D Prime Edition	17	3.5
Tekken Hybrid	16	2.5
Tekken Tag Tournament 2	22	3.25
Tera	19	4.0
Test Drive: Ferrari Racing Legends	21	3.0
The Testament of Sherlock Holmes	24	3.25
Theatrhythm Final Fantasy	20	4.25
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13	18	4.0
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier	20	4.0
Transformers: Fall of Cybertron	22	4.25
Twisted Metal	18	3.75
U		
UFC Undisputed 3	17	3.0
Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3	16	5.0
Unit 13	18	4.0
W		
The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings	19	4.5
World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria	24	4.0
WWE '12	16	4.0
WWE '13	24	4.0
X		
XCOM: Enemy Unknown	24	4.5
Y		
Yakuza: Dead Souls	19	3.25
Your Shape: Fitness Evolved 2012	16	4.5
Z		
Zumba Fitness Rush	18	4.5

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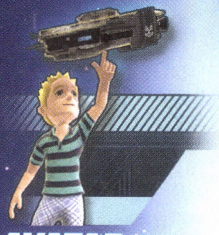

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GEAR

• Photos: Samantha Berg

GEAR

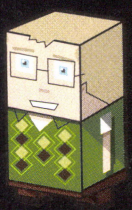
90 Thrustmaster Ferrari Vibration GT Cockpit 458 Italia Edition

92 Razer BlackWidow Ultimate 2013 Mechanical Gaming Keyboard

93 Sony Pulse Wireless Stereo Headset

94 AOC E2752VH 27-inch LED HD Monitor

95 BenQ RL2450HT 24-inch LCD HD Monitor



RYAN SAYS:

As the holiday season approaches, there's a ton of great new gear hitting Best Buy shelves. This month, we decided to hit a mix of PC and console equipment to help prepare all gamers for the coming avalanche of great holiday games. Racing fans, be sure to check out Thrustmaster's new Ferrari cockpit. For PS3 owners, we've got the lowdown on Sony's latest wireless gaming headset. And for the PC crowd, we take on Razer's BlackWidow gaming keyboard in addition to two flashy PC displays. Game on!

FERRARI VIBRATION GT COCKPIT 458 ITALIA ED.

Manufacturer: Thrustmaster
www.thrustmaster.com
Price: $299.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4

01 BUTTONS!
Control your Xbox 360 from the comfort of...well, this awesome wheel.

02 COMFY
This 11-inch replica Ferrari wheel feels great to the touch.

FERRARI VIBRATION GT COCKPIT 458 ITALIA ED.

Xbox 360 racers will love this wheel • Words: William O'Neal

A major problem with racing wheel setups is that you usually have to mount them to something. But most console gamers don't sit at a desk—we sit in a chair in the middle of the room. Enter the Thrustmaster Ferrari Vibration Cockpit 458 Italia Edition, which is compatible with Xbox 360 and PC.

Anyone not familiar with these setups will immediately ask themselves: What is this thing? Simply put, it's a racing cockpit that you place on the floor in front of your favorite gaming chair, adjust to your height, and start racing. When you're done, it can be folded and easily stored.

I tested the wheel with *Forza Motorsport 4*, and I loved every minute of it. The entire setup weighs about 22 pounds, which added a lot of stability to the entire experience. It never slipped on my carpet, even when the action got particularly physical. Likewise, it was plenty stable on the concrete floor in my basement.

The wheel is pretty accurate, and the metal paddle shifters attached to the wheel turn with you. This makes it easier to control your car in the heat of a race. The force feedback on this setup isn't the most powerful, but that didn't really detract from the experience. If you're a virtual racer looking for an easy setup, look no further.

WHEN YOU'RE DONE, IT CAN BE FOLDED AND EASILY STORED

03 GRIP AND GO
The cockpit boasts a convenient handle for lugging the thing around—which is great because it's heavy.

04 LENGTH
You can easily adjust the length of the steering column to accomodate your height.

05 METAL
The stamped steel pedals are very solid and add a sense of realism to your virtual racing experience.

06 GOT BASE?
At around 22 pounds, this baby isn't going anywhere!

01 STURDY
The BlackWidow's base is made of strong plastic that can withstand the punishment of hardcore PC gamers.

02 BACKLIT
There are five different light settings to ensure that you can find a brightness level with which you're comfortable.

RAZER BLACKWIDOW ULTIMATE 2013 GAMING KEYBOARD

Manufacturer: Razer
www.razerzone.com
Price: $129.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4.25

RAZER BLACKWIDOW ULTIMATE 2013 GAMING KEYBOARD

A lean, green keyboard machine • Words: Ryan Taljonick

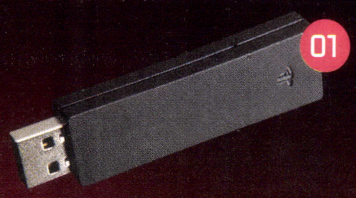
Razer's BlackWidow Ultimate is an attractive option as your new gateway into virtual worlds. It's equipped with high-quality mechanical switches, a set of macro keys, connection ports, and backlit keys that glow a seductive neon green.

Sure, cosmetics aren't the most important feature when hunting for a new keyboard, but the BlackWidow Ultimate is sure to turn a few heads. Best of all, it's easily one of the sturdiest keyboards I've tested, and its braided USB cable keeps the connection wires protected from harm. Its highly durable mechanical keys give just the right amount of resistance and make an undeniably cool clicking noise when pressed. Be warned, though: This keyboard is a bit loud in comparison to other mechanical options, and you're sure to annoy anyone nearby if you're furiously mashing buttons while playing games or simply typing.

The BlackWidow's keys have a reduced actuation distance of about 2mm, meaning they're located a tad closer together compared to on a typical keyboard. The upshot is you can reach keys quicker, giving you a slight competitive edge in games, though some users may overshoot intended keys by a touch. Still, this keyboard—despite its rather high price tag—sets the bar for both quality and features, especially for gamers familiar with the term "actions per minute."

SONY PULSE WIRELESS STEREO HEADSET

PS3 gamers look no further • Words: William O'Neal



If there's one thing to note about the PS3, it's the relative ease with which Sony's machine can deliver truly wireless audio.

Sony's Pulse Wireless Headset: Elite Edition for the PS3 is something that PlayStation gamers will no doubt love. With an MSRP of around $150, the Pulse is a great headset that's super comfortable and fairly sturdy. It's also one of the easiest headsets to pair with a console. You simply plug in the included USB wireless adapter and you're good to go.

Boasting the same virtual 7.1 surround-sound technology as last year's model, Sony's new headset simply sounds great while playing everything from shooters to sports games.

The only downside is that this headset is designed for the PS3 only, so multiplatform gamers may be better served with the more versatile Astro A50.

01 WIRELESS
The Pulse is fully wireless, thanks to this USB adapter. It also has a 3.5mm audio jack for other devices.

02 BIG CANS
The ear cups on the Pulse are nice and big. In fact, they're so comfy that I had no problem playing for hours.

03 ADAPTABLE
I have a pretty big head—thankfully, the headband on the Pulse easily accomodated my massive-sized dome.

SONY PULSE WIRELESS STEREO HEADSET

Manufacturer: Sony
www.sony.com
Price: $149.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4

AOC E2752VH LED MONITOR

It's not a lot more than a pretty face • Words: Hollander Cooper

AOC E2752VH LED MONITOR

Manufacturer: AOC
www.us.aoc.com
Price: $299.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4

The current "sweet spot" for PC monitors sits around 23 inches. Compared to that, AOC's e2752Vh is massive, coming in at 27 inches of beautiful LED glory. And after gaming on it for a few days, you'll have a hard time going back to smaller options. The screen has the typical assortment of PC specs, with a resolution that tops out at full HD 1080p (1920x1080). Billed as a monitor for gamers, the e2752Vh has a 2ms response time and renders colors bright and clear; the display never looks saturated or washed out. Best of all, despite its mammoth size, this display is thin and light, making it easy to relocate when needed. Besides the size, however, the e2752Vh doesn't really have any bells or whistles to get excited about. No 3D support and lackluster menus keep it from being anything more than it appears: a big, sexy PC monitor.

01 SPEAKERS
There is a pair of 2.5W speakers on the e2752Vh, but they aren't going to replace your headphones anytime soon.

02 TILT ONLY
The base is quite low, and though the monitor can be tilted, there's no ability to raise the monitor up.

03 ROOMY
If you game for more than a few hours a day, you'll quickly notice how convenient it is to have a massive monitor.

BENQ RL2450HT LED MONITOR

Fast response time at the expense of color quality • Words: Ryan Taljonick

When it comes to gaming displays, response time trumps all else. In this regard, BenQ's RL2450HT monitor—marketed specifically to real-time strategy gamers—delivers with its 2ms GTG response speed.

Unfortunately, that speed comes at the sacrifice of color quality, as whites and blacks aren't as defined as you might see elsewhere. The RL2450HT comes with a staggering set of features and display adjustments, including RTS mode, which is a built-in preset that helps units stand out against darker backgrounds. But unless you're a hardcore RTS player, you probably won't notice enough to warrant a purchase. There's also an option to virtualize a variety of display sizes, a neat tool for tournament gamers. Similarly priced displays may offer better picture quality, albeit without the RL2450HT's cool chasis and adjustability. If you can forego the display features, look elsewhere.

BENQ RL2450HT LCD MONITOR

Manufacturer: BenQ
www.benq.com
Price: $234.99

OVERALL SCORE: 3.5

01

02

03

01 DISPLAY
Compared to similarly priced monitors, colors here were oversaturated and a bit blurry, though not terrible.

02 CONTROL
What the RL2450HT lacks in clarity, it makes up for in features. The control interface is easy to use, and has tons of options.

03 HOT BASE
This display has an undeniably attractive chassis and base that offers height, tilt, and orientation adjustments.

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CUT: ·····

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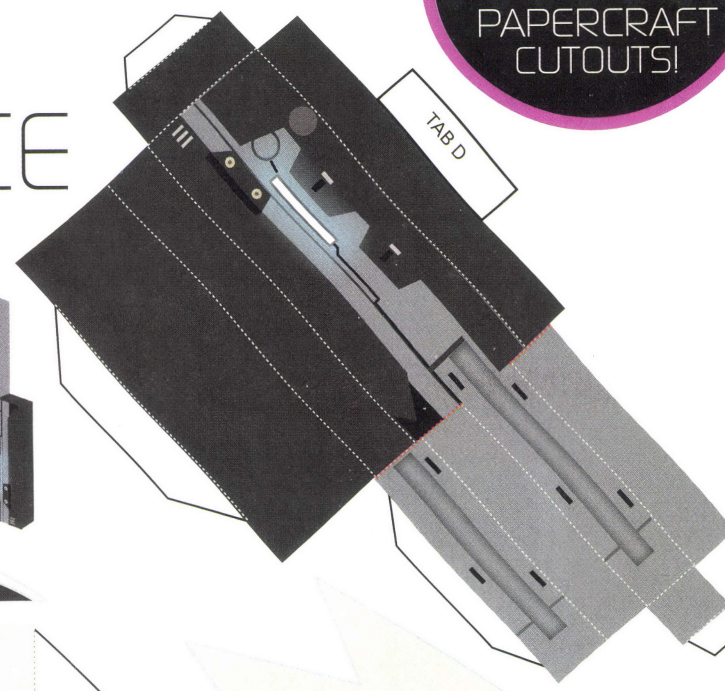

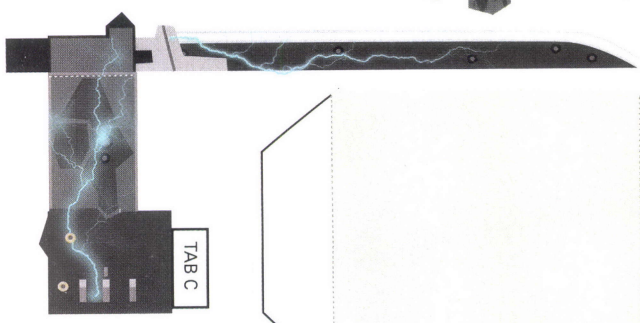

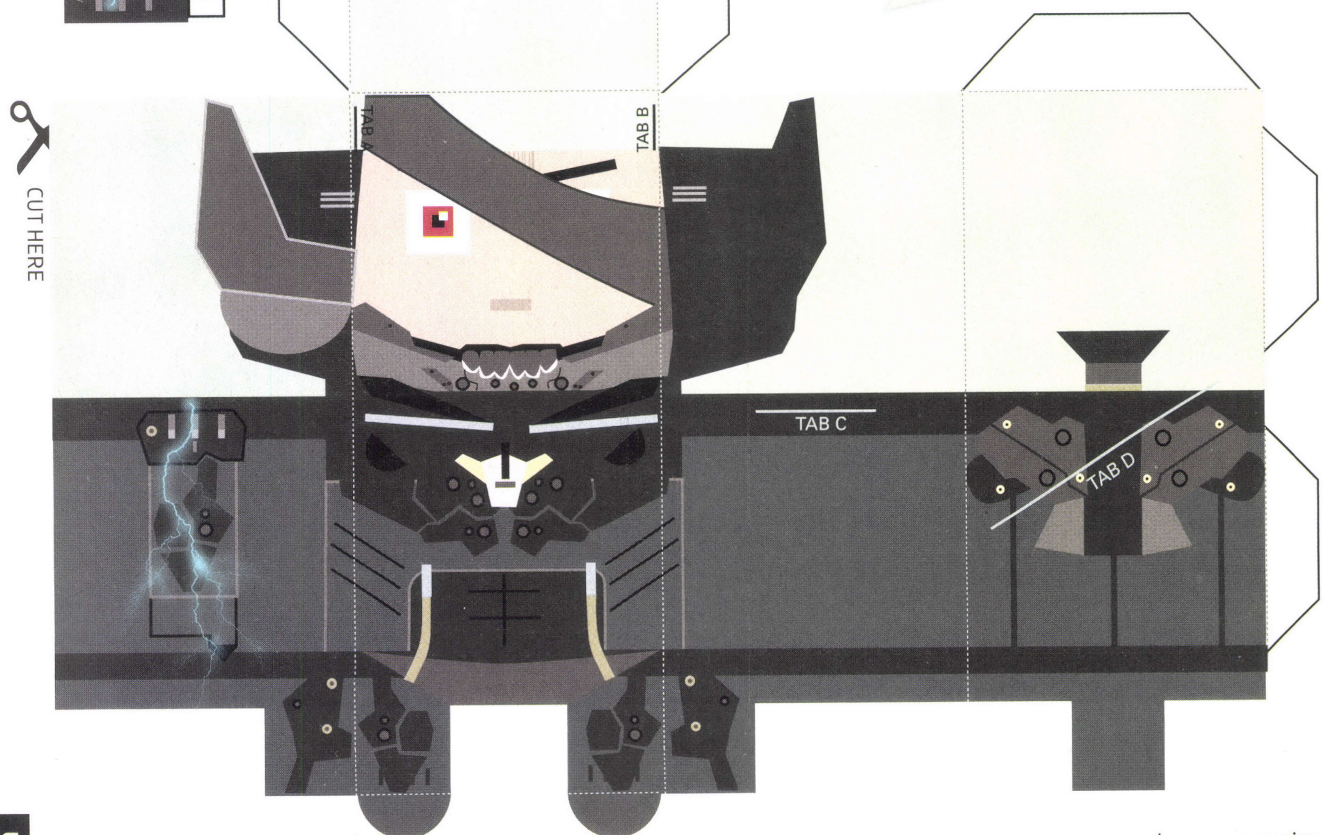

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